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THE DILEMMA: CAREER TRANSITION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE  
FOOTBALL PLAYERS AT DIVISION I INSTITUTIONS

A Dissertation  
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in the Department of Higher Education  
The University of Mississippi

by

KELLEN JAMIL NORTHCUTT

August 2013



## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore and understand perceptions of African American male football athletes at Division I institutions that also played professional football, regarding their collegiate experiences and transition from athletics to post-playing careers. The study examined issues of race and social interaction, academic preparation, economic status, leadership opportunities, and the transitions from collegiate and professional sports. The participants in this study consisted of six former NFL players who attended college and played collegiately at NCAA predominately white Division I institutions in the Southern Regional Education Board member states in the United States. Using qualitative interview methods (pre-interview, focus group, individual interview), data was collected and analyzed using critical race and transition theories. The results of the analysis of the interview data identified six major themes: 1) The Importance of Football, 2) The Academic Smokescreen, 3) Issues of Race, 4) Economic Hardships, 5) Student-Athlete Rights, and 6) Difficult Transitions and Identity Issues.

## DEDICATION

This research study is dedicated to:

My wife and children. They have supported me through this endeavor. Without their love, patience, understanding, and support I would have never completed this great work.

My loving parents. Your sacrifice, unwavering support, wisdom, leadership, and encouragement have molded me into the man I am today. Know that I am truly grateful for you.

My late grandparents. I truly understand the sacrifices you made for me to have opportunities to live a better life as an African American. I know that your ceiling was my floor! I hope that you see that I listened to you about the importance of education, in particular, Granddaddy. I can still hear your voice saying, “make sure you get your education; no one can take that from you.”

My mentors. These include my parents (Sammy and Theresa Northcutt), Derek Horne, Dr. Derrick Gragg, Ray Farmer, Woodie Dixon, David Cutcliffe, Yvette Rice, Dr. Phyllis Adams, and John Olive. I am thankful for each of you. Your commitment to excellence and heart to serve others is an inspiration. To all of my family and friends, know that your fellowship and encouragement was instrumental in the completion of this work.

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Notably, I want to thank my family, especially my beautiful Queen, Kimberly. Your unwavering love, support, encouragement, and commitment to our family made this accomplishment possible. Know that I love you. To my classmates, thank you for the friendships, class discussions, study groups, and great memories. I would be remiss if I did not thank James Meredith and the countless others who toiled for civil rights for African Americans. Your courage, tenacity, and sacrifices made it possible for me to complete this degree. Know that I am truly grateful.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### **The Research Problem**

Undeniably, the sports industry has impacted American society in many ways. From school age children competing in recreational leagues to learn character virtues and the importance of physical activity, to professional athletes entertaining the world through competition and serving as role models and heroes, sports are valued and imbedded in American culture. Although sports are an element of popular culture, they have a tremendous impact on society. Sports impact the economy, education, family, and social institutions (Beamon, 2008). According to a Harris Interactive Poll by Corso (2012), football has become America's most popular sport. Because of its popularity, both collegiate and professional football are multibillion-dollar industries. Collegiate football, in particular, has garnered the scrutiny of critics (Stieber, 1991; Yost, 2010; Zimbalist, 1999) for the unequal distribution of resources to athletes. For many years, African American male football student-athletes at National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I-A (currently known as Football Subdivision or FBS) institutions have been key factors in the revenue earned by universities (Beamon, 2008; Harrison & Lawrence, 2003; Stieber, 1991; Yost, 2010; Zimbalist, 1999).

The NCAA is the non-profit governing body of intercollegiate athletics. Both the NCAA and member institutions serve as revenue generating agents for athletic related events. A disproportionate representation of African American collegiate athletes on predominantly white

campuses raises many issues. Harrison and Lawrence (2003) report, “one out of nine African American students on predominately white campuses is a student-athlete on athletic scholarship, compared to one out of fifty White American students on athletic scholarship” (p. 374). With the visibility of football at an all-time high and the skewed representation of African Americans at predominately white institutions, African American football student-athletes often prepare for a future career as a professional athlete and not in an academic field (Beamon, 2008; Edwards, 2000; Murphy, Petitpas, & Brewer, 1996; Settles, Sellers, & Damas, 2002).

Participation in sports has both positive and negative effects for African Americans. Positively, it provides access to higher education and professional sports opportunities. Further, athletic participation provides role models and a source of racial pride in the African American community (Donnor, 2005). Negatively, participation in sports has been noted by scholars (Harrison & Lawrence, 2003; Murphy et al., 1996; Shurts & Shoffner, 2004) to contribute to low levels of career maturity for athletes. Career maturity is the level of preparedness for careers other than sports. Sadly, most football student-athletes are oblivious to the grim reality that they will never be afforded the opportunity to play professional football. According to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (2011), only 1.7% of 15,086 senior football athletes continue their careers and play in the National Football League (NFL). For those who possess the ability to be drafted by the NFL, there is no assurance of longevity in the league. Pitts, Popovich, and Bober (1986) conducted a survey commissioned by the National Football League Players Association that found that the average length of a professional football player’s career in the NFL was only 3.2 years (as cited in Shahnasarian, 1992). These data heighten the urgency for stakeholders (i.e. institutions, student-athletes, parents, and coaches) to focus on the career transition process from athlete to non-athlete. One of the reasons individuals pursue higher

education is to prepare for a successful career, yet FBS institutions often fail to prepare football athletes (Beamon, 2008; Donnor 2005; Melendez, 2008; Singer, 2005, 2009), who generate millions of dollars of revenue, for alternatives to a professional athletic career. While the prowess of football athletes is valued and reinforced through sports marketing, time spent on sport related activities, and much media attention, the academic and occupational development of athletes is often neglected. Sadly, this neglect affects athletes' attractiveness and marketability in the workforce upon leaving school (Clopton, 2011; Cooper, 2012).

### **Studies That Have Explored the Problem**

Research related to career transition, sports, and African American males has dealt with the negative impact of professional sports aspirations and athletic identity, which is the “degree to which an individual identifies with the athlete role” (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993, p. 237). A number of studies have focused on athletic identity (Brewer, Cornelius, Stephan & Van Raalte, 2010; Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993; Grove, Fish & Eklund, 2004; Miller & Kerr, 2003; Phoenix, Faulkner & Sparkes, 2005; Settles et al., 2002; Webb, Nasco, Riley & Headrick, 1998; Yopyk & Prentice, 2005), the socialization of the sports culture (Harris, 1994), and the negative effects of defining one's self as an athlete only. While many high school student-athletes aspire to have professional careers following collegiate athletics, these athletes have less than a one percent chance of playing professionally (Edwards, 2000; Lapchick, 2001; National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2011).

The role of racial discrimination and its effects on American society are also relevant when examining sports culture and career transition. Research (Clopton, 2010; Cooper, 2012; Singer, 2009) related to this issue has found that there is an overrepresentation of African American athletes in the revenue generating sports of football and basketball (Beamon, 2008;

Donnor, 2005; Harrison & Lawrence, 2003; Kennedy & Dimick, 1987; Lapchick, 2010, 2011; Sage, 2000; Singer, 2005). Regardless, there is an underrepresentation of African Americans among major decision-making and upper management positions in college athletics (i.e. director of athletics, associate athletic director, president, chancellor, vice president/chancellor, commissioner, etc.). Table I provides the percentages of African American male and female upper level administrator positions at NCAA Division I universities, excluding Historically Black Universities, for the 1995-1996 and 2009-2010 school years.

TABLE I  
PERCENTAGES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN ADMINISTRATORS EXCLUDING  
HISTORICALLY BLACK INSTITUTIONS

Position	Percent Black	
	1995-1996	2009-2010
Director of Athletics	3.8 (3.4 Men/0.4 Women)	6.6 (6.0 Men/0.6 Women)
Associate Director of Athletics	6.9 (5.5 Men/1.4 Women)	8.5 (5.5 Men/3.0 Women)
Assistant Director of Athletics	8.0 (6.7 Men/1.3 Women)	8.9 (6.4 Men/ 2.5 Women)
Senior Women Administrator	2.4 (0.0 Men/ 2.4 Women)	9.6. (0.0 Men/ 9.6 Women)
Fundraiser/Development Manager	2.4 (2.0 Men/0.4 Women)	6.7 (4.8 Men/1.9 Women)

Taken from Race and Gender Demographics of NCAA Member Institutions Personnel Report (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2010)

According to the table above, African Americans have not been afforded the same opportunity to succeed in administrative positions in collegiate sports at predominately white institutions as they have on the field. Lapchick (2011b) reported that Caucasians hold 333 (91.2 percent) of the 365 campus leadership positions (president, athletics director, and faculty

athletics representative) at Football Subdivision Schools. This indicates a lack of African American role models for African American student-athletes at predominately white institutions. Positive role models may inspire student-athletes to pursue athletics administration as an achievable career option after playing at the collegiate or professional level. Furthermore, job titles and upper level management positions equate to higher salaries. The disparity of African Americans in upper level athletic management positions is evidence of the gap in social capital between African Americans and Caucasians in American society. A study conducted by Kaushal and Nepomnyaschy (2009) examined wealth, race, and educational outcomes of children and found that certain “disadvantages that children in minority households face are strongly linked with income and wealth disparities” (p. 970).

Economic resources are necessary for institutions of higher learning to thrive. Higher education funding resources are received through multiple streams. Sources of revenue for institutions come from tuition, private donations and federal grants, endowments, state appropriations, technology transfers, licensing of school symbols, and integrated marketing plans (Yeager, Nelson, Potter, Weidman, & Zullo, 2001). Research (Beamon, 2008; Flowers, 2009; Meggyesy, 2000; Stieber, 1991; Zimbalist, 1999) shows that athletic programs contribute significantly in helping to maintain and achieve the financial goals of these institutions. Athletic revenue is referred to as “commercialism.” Commercialism is problematic and a subject of much debate in higher education (Beamon, 2008; Flowers, 2009; Stieber, 1991; Yost, 2010; Zimbalist, 1999). A tension exists between academia and athletics when perceptions exist that student-athletes are exploited in order to help institutions achieve their financial goals (Beamon, 2008). Institutions exploit athletes when the athletic role of the student is reinforced for the financial gain of the institution and academic achievement of the student is neglected (Beamon, 2008).

This exploitation of athletes is also highlighted by differences in graduation rates between African American and Caucasian student-athletes. According to Lapchick (2000) and Beamon (2008), African Americans in revenue generating sports such as football and basketball graduate at lower rates than Caucasians. Cooper (2012) raises the issue of academic neglect by examining the history and biographies of non-athlete and athlete African Americans. While the NCAA (2011) reports that the student-athletes graduation success rate (65%) is two percentage points higher than the general student body at Division I schools, it also reports that the graduation success rate of African American student-athletes (66%) is twenty percent lower than Caucasians student-athletes (86%). Not receiving an educational return on an investment in collegiate athletics can be problematic for any student-athlete, but for the African American student-athlete, obtaining a degree is paramount for him or her to achieve success and transition out of sport successfully in a society where inequalities still exist. For this research, Critical Race Theory (Bell, 1992; Brown, 2003; Landson-Billings, 1998; Milner, 2007) and Transition Theory (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 1998) will provide theoretical lenses to understand the issues of race and transition African American athletes face.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) challenges status quo ideologies of race, racism, and racial power in America (Bell, 1992; Brown, 2003; Donnor, 2005; Landson-Billings, 1998; Milner, 2007). Recognizing continuing political and economic inequalities based on race, critical race theorists work to eliminate racism from social institutions and achieve social justice. Critical race theorists (Bell, 1992; Brown, 2003; Landson-Billings, 1998; Milner, 2007) raise awareness and encourage Caucasians to acknowledge the privileges associated with being Caucasian (Brown,



2003; Landson-Billings, 1998; Milner, 2007). According to scholars (Harrison & Lawrence, 2003; Singer, 2005; Tate, 1997; Wing, 1997), CRT has a number of major tenets:

- 1) Racism is prevalent in American society, entrenched legally, socially, and even psychologically;
- 2) A society creates or develops social veracity to accommodate its own self-interest through the use of narrative analysis to reinterpret civil liberties and dispute unjust treatment that was implemented to favor a homogeneous group;
- 3) CRT explains that Caucasian elites will tolerate and encourage the advancement of minorities in order to promote the Caucasian agenda and self-interest.

In regards to the sports industry in America, critical race theorists highlight racism in athletics as normal within traditional predominately white institutions (Harrison & Lawrence, 2003).

Furthermore, the lackluster recruitment of minority student scholars is juxtaposed to the energetic recruitment of minority student-athletes. This race-based phenomenon in college athletics supports the self-interest argument in Critical Race Theory. African American athletes are often provided access to predominately white institutions they may otherwise not be able to attend for academic or financial reasons to increase the prestige and revenue of these institutions. At the center of this debate is the overarching tendency of predominantly white institutions to recruit African American athletes to play football. The expectations of extremely high levels of performance, however, may inadvertently minimize the expectation for scholastic achievement. The tenets of Critical Race Theory highlight potential reasons for the lack of preparation for the transition of African American football student-athletes from college to the “real” world.

Transition Theory offers models of changes that happen to individuals as they transition from one stage of life to the next. Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) define transition as

“any event, or non-event, that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles” (as cited in Evans et al., 1998, p. 111). Additionally, the theory addresses how individuals deal or cope with occurrences (Komives & Woodard, 2003). Meaning is given to transitions that take place in the lives of people. They are classified into three types: Type, Context, and Impact (Evans et al., 1998). Type refers to transitions that are anticipated (predictable), unanticipated (unpredictable), and non-events (an event likely to happen that does not happen) (Evans et al., 1998). Context defines the relationship associated with the transition and the setting. Impact explains the adjustments made by the individual as a result of the transition. The process of transition happens over a period of time. These stages in the process involve individuals to move in, through, and out of events or non-events (Evans et al., 1998). Furthermore, the theory identifies factors that impact a person’s ability to handle a transition and are “influenced by a ratio of assets and liabilities in regard to four sets of factors: situation, self, support, and strategies” (Evans et al., 1998, p. 115). As the theory relates to collegiate and professional African American football players, the end of a playing career brings abrupt changes and challenges. These changes and challenges have similar or different meanings depending on the athlete. After transitioning from a familiar environment (football culture) to a new environment (real world, student, job, etc.), African American football athletes’ positions shift from belonging to marginality. In the football culture, the role of the athlete was unambiguous; however, a new environment will bring uncertainty which often hinders a smooth transition from sport to an alternative career (Komives & Woodard, 2003).

### **Significance of the Study**

Current statistics related to college student-athletes show chances to advance to the professional level are slim to none. Data (NCAA, 2011) has shown that less than two percent of

college athletes will ever make it to the professional ranks. For the African American athlete, studies (Beamon, 2008; Edwards, 2000; Harrison & Lawrence, 2003) have illustrated that socialization into sport happens early and that the motivation to play professional sports is significantly greater than for Caucasian athletes. The unhealthy emphasis placed on sports as the only way to succeed, coupled with other factors such as racism, academic neglect, athletic identity issues, time demands of sports, academic clustering, exploitation, and negative faculty perceptions of student-athletes, affect the successful career transitions of African American male student-athletes. Traditionally, studies (Beamon, 2008; Cooper, 2012; Harrison & Lawrence, 2003; Melendez, 2008; Singer, 2005, 2009) have examined current collegiate student-athletes and their experiences. Cooper (2012) did this by examining the socio-historical experiences of African American athletes at predominantly white institutions and connecting their experiences to broad social issues in the United States faced by non-athlete African Americans. Cooper, using sociological imagination as a framework to examine the experience of black athletes at predominately white institutions, focused on four areas of concern:

1. Racial Discrimination/Social Isolation – Minority experiences in society where white dominant culture is the norm (Cooper, 2012, p. 262-263).
2. Academic Neglect – The belief that blacks are subordinate to whites has created barriers for blacks to achieve equal opportunity for educational advancement (Cooper, 2012, p. 263-264).
3. Economic Deprivation – Disparity created for blacks through exploitation, unequal distribution of wealth, and stratification of power (Cooper, 2012, p. 264-266).

4. Limited Leadership Opportunities – Racist belief that blacks' intellect is inferior to whites has caused blacks to be underrepresented in leadership in society (Cooper, 2012, p. 266-267).

Cooper's research is extremely valuable for providing sociological context for understanding the experiences of African American athletes based on conceptualization of the problem using sociological methods, existing research, and individual accounts available through the media. Cooper's research is nonetheless limited because it does not include original voices of African American athletes. This research added to the research of Cooper (2012) by telling the stories of African American football athletes who have completed careers as collegiate and professional athletes and have transitioned to post-playing life. Furthermore, studying the research subjects, who were older and more experienced athletes, enabled them to present firsthand perceptions and experiences about the sports industry. Moreover, this study of African American football student-athletes gave this minority group an opportunity to voice their opinions about their experiences at a predominantly white institution in narrative form.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand and explore perceptions of African American male football athletes at Division I institutions, who also played professional football, regarding their collegiate experiences and transition from athletics to post-playing careers. Topics examined include issues of race and social interaction, academic preparation, economic status, leadership opportunities, and the transitions from collegiate and professional sports.

While earning an athletic scholarship provides a great opportunity for an African American male to advance academically and athletically, focusing solely on athletics can serve

as a hindrance to his future and career development. To better understand the phenomena of post-athletic career transition of African American football players, this research examined the experiences, perceptions, and views of a sample of these individuals. The research was guided by a central question and four sub-questions.

### **Research Questions**

The Central Question of this research was:

- 1) What are the experiences and perceptions of African American male football student-athletes at Division I institutions who played professional football concerning their collegiate experience and the transition from athletics to non-playing careers?

Sub-questions:

- a) What are the experiences and perceptions of former African American athletes at Division I institutions who played professional football concerning their collegiate experience and the relationship between their post-playing career and race and social interaction?
- b) What are the experiences and perceptions of former African American athletes at Division I institutions who played professional football concerning their collegiate experience and the relationship between their post-playing career and academic preparation?
- c) What are the experiences and perceptions of former African American athletes at Division I institutions who played professional football concerning their collegiate experience and the relationship between their post-playing career and economic status?
- d) What are the experiences and perceptions of former African American athletes at Division I institutions who played professional football concerning their collegiate

experience and the relationship between their post-playing career and leadership opportunities?

These questions were answered by interviewing former Division I African American male football student-athletes who also played professional football in the National Football League. Interviewing former Division I student-athletes who played professional football provided firsthand perceptions and experiences of these athletes about the central phenomenon. The player interviews were analyzed and discussed using Critical Race Theory and Transition Theory as an analytical framework. The data was organized and reported in the form of issues and sensitizing concepts. Issues are those key concepts or concerns illuminated by the participants (Patton, 2002). Sensitizing concepts are “categories that the analyst brings to the data” (Patton, 2002, p. 456). According to Patton (2002), “phenomenological analysis seeks to grasp and elucidate the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of a phenomenon for a person or group of people” (p. 482). Phenomenology applied to this study of career transition focused on exploring and portraying the lived experiences of the research subjects.

## **Conclusion**

This study examined how participants perceived their collegiate experience and their own career transitions at the end of their athletic careers. Career transition is uniquely important for collegiate athletes because the chance to be drafted to the NFL is meager. For those that are lucky and go on to the NFL, the career is brief. With the popularity of football at an all-time high, football student-athletes at the Division I level are important figures on campuses. Coupled with an environment that rewards winning in various ways (i.e. raises for coaches, administrators, etc.) and shuns losing, student-athletes are put through rigorous workout regimens and spend the majority of their time on athletic related activities. This reinforces the

athletic role and diminishes the need to focus on the opportunity to invest in their future away from the athletic playing field.

### **Organization of the Study**

The following chapter will discuss the literature related to the issues in the study and other similar topics that contribute to the research. The third chapter will explain the qualitative method, description of the participants and setting, procedure for collecting data, instruments, and research design. The fourth chapter will present the results of the qualitative analysis. Lastly, the final chapter will discuss the findings and conclude with strengths and limitations of the study.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This review of literature seeks to provide a holistic perspective of the interrelation of complex issues of education, athletics, race, and the lives of African American athletes. Patton (2002) grounds holistic perspective as a foundational theme of qualitative analyses. According to Patton, with a holistic perspective, “the whole phenomenon under study is understood as a complex system that is more than the sum of its parts” (p. 59). The focus is on complex interdependence and system dynamics that cannot meaningfully be reduced to a few discrete variables and linear, cause-effect relationships. Thus, the goal of this chapter is to present and discuss research literature in a wide range of areas that influence the circumstances of the career transition of African American athletes. This chapter discusses:

- a) the history of academics and the sports industry
- b) the role of athletes in college integration
- c) foundations of Critical Race Theory
- d) disparities in graduation rates of African Americans and Caucasians in sports
- e) issues concerning the grouping of student-athletes in academic majors
- f) time pressures on student-athletes
- g) psychological identity issues among student-athletes
- h) the lure of professional sports
- i) the unequal distribution of wealth in sports



j) college faculty perceptions of student-athletes.

These ten topic areas are discussed with comments relevant to this research.

### **History of Sports Commercialization**

The collaboration of higher education and intercollegiate athletics has been a subject of much debate and scrutiny over the years. On one hand, academic scholars argue that athletic programs do not fit into the mission of higher education, which is generally teaching, service, and research. On the other hand, critics (Stieber, 1991; Yost, 2010; Zimbalist, 1999) assert that universities use athletic programs to promote higher education. Research suggests that participation in athletic programs market higher education and its educational programs, thus increasing enrollment and prestige of institutions. Unlike the current state of sports on university campuses, intercollegiate athletics were once separate from the educational mission of academia. College athletics began in Colonial America (in the northeast) with inter-class games, created by students, that sought to give the student body an opportunity to divert from the rigors of scholastic activities. According to Flowers (2009), the inter-class games “tended to draw the student body together in a form of symbolic brotherhood and fraternity” (p. 345). Furthermore, some of academia’s professors and clergy began to observe, understand and communicate the benefits for students of participation in sporting activities. One of the main benefits associated with participation in extracurricular activities was discipline. While some clergy supported the notion that physical activity promoted Christian character, most campus leaders did not agree. Since most college leaders were not vested in the fun games of the students, students were given autonomy to organize these events without the involvement of the university administration unless incidents transpired. “Though often scorned by the faculty and forbidden at some colleges, sports became, for the most part, tolerated affairs that were viewed as an opportunity

for students to ‘let off a little steam’ before settling into more intellectual matters” (Flowers, 2009, p. 345). As higher education evolved into the nineteenth century, sports became an important outreach mechanism for institutions. Sports were used to unify institutions and their local communities. Lucas and Smith (1978) believed the renewed spirit of community was welcomed by institutional leaders in order to attract new students and increase institutional esteem (as cited in Flowers, 2009, p. 346). Having the favor of higher education, athletic competition expanded from intra-college games to inter-college competitions during the industrial revolution when transportation became more readily available due to the railroad. Local businessmen, sports promoters, and media entities such as newspapers began to see the benefits and revenues associated with competitive sports. By 1844 both Yale and Harvard had formed their own boating clubs and held contests with established clubs in surrounding communities (Flowers, 2009). Yale and Harvard met in the first American intercollegiate contest in 1852. James Elkins, a local railroad superintendent, is credited with organizing the athletic contest. His offer to cover all expenses for both crew teams for a contest on Lake Winnepesaukee, to generate revenue and promote his rail service to a local summer resort, was the beginning of commercialism in college sports. Soon after the first rowing match, the sports of baseball and football featured their first intercollegiate games. Amherst competed against Williams in the first baseball contest in 1859. In 1869, Rutgers and Princeton met in the first intercollegiate football game.

Since institutions did not support sporting events financially, students were charged with the task of funding club teams. This was often a difficult task for students on campuses and created opportunities for these student-run sports activities to be woven into higher education due to lack of funding for athletic club teams. In order to solve funding issues, institutions called

upon alumni to manage and finance club sports. This gave rise to the notion to “win at all cost” because alumni took pride in their alma mater and wanted to win more than have a friendly competition with another institution (Flowers, 2009). This notion affected athletics as well as institutions during the enrollment decline of the 1840s and 1850s. Colleges were forced to compete for students. Sports were used to market colleges and universities. This formula for success changed the landscape of social institutions in America by commingling college boards of clergymen with businessmen. After this paradigm shift in the leadership style of colleges, institutions began to use sporting events to generate revenue for the university through competition and enrollment. Subsequently, the games became entertainment and a way for institutions to build community and reap financial rewards. Additionally, this led to other unscrupulous behaviors, such as hiring professional coaches and lowering academic standards to employ working class athletes to help universities further their economic agendas. These motives led to the regulation of intercollegiate athletics as amateurism and upholding egalitarian principles in order to “protect the reputations of colleges and universities by ascribing an educative function to intercollegiate athletics” (Flowers, 2009, p. 356). Likewise, the same deceitful motivations that led to more policy led to integration, which is believed by some skeptics such as Rhoden (2006) to have been “a winning proposition for the whites who controlled the sports-industrial complex to exploit black muscle and talent, thus sucking the life out of black institutions, while at the same time giving themselves credit for being humanitarians” (p. 135).

## **Integration**

Integration is defined as an act or instance of combining into an integral whole. For most Americans, integration was viewed as a positive occurrence that gave minorities,

particularly African Americans, equal access to opportunity. Integration gave African American athletes access to professional leagues and predominately white institutions, primarily in the South (Demas, 2010; Rhoden, 2006; Ross, 1999). However, there are a growing number of African Americans in sports who question the motivations of predominately white institutions to integrate sports in the South during the 1970s. Some view integration from the perspective that, while integration gave blacks access to predominately white institutions, blacks lost the opportunity to occupy key decision-making roles not only in sports, but also in other fields and occupations (Bell, 1992; Rhoden, 2006). In essence, African Americans had access without power. As the integration of college football by William Henry Lewis at Amherst in 1888 was significant, The University of Southern California (USC) football game versus The University of Alabama (ALA), played in Birmingham, Alabama on September 12, 1970, is believed by scholars to be of equal or more significance in college sports (Demas, 2010; Rhoden, 2006).

Rhoden (2006) writes:

Jerry Claiborne, an assistant coach at Alabama, reportedly said after the USC game that Sam Cunningham (black running back at USC) had done more for integration in two hours than Martin Luther King Jr. had accomplished in more than a decade. (p. 135)

The USC football team traveled to Alabama with an integrated team of black student-athletes starting in key positions such as quarterback and running back to face the legendary coach Bear Bryant's all-white team of Alabama. Consequently, USC defeated ALA that day 42-21.

According to Rhoden (2006), the game between USC and ALA started "a chain reaction that escalated the African American presence in White Southern sports" (p. 134). It was clear that African Americans' athletic prowess was needed if schools like Alabama in the South were going to compete nationally. By 1980, thirty percent of the Southeastern Conference's (SEC) football players were African American (Demas, 2010). This percentage grew to fifty-seven

percent in 1990 (Demas, 2010). While integration offered clear benefits to African Americans, the losses that the African American communities and professionals suffered, beyond participating in sports, were enormous. Some researchers believe integration stopped the empowerment movement of African American communities to be independent. Additionally, whites and predominately white institutions benefited from integration the most. Rhoden (2006) explains:

The key to the ultimate appeal of integration for white coaches was that it would not mean a corresponding loss of power; in essence, whites could have their cake and eat it too. Integration on the sports field would not mean the transfer of power from whites to blacks any more than the black workforce in the cotton fields threatened white control of antebellum plantations. Blacks had not shared in the fruits of their industry then, and would not share in it now. (p. 139)

Furthermore, as a result of integration, African American institutions were downsized and black professionals lost autonomy in decision-making positions while whites kept theirs. This quandary of enclosure without power has given birth to the theoretical framework of Critical Race Theory.

### **Critical Race Theory**

It is perceived in America that sports promote racial harmony and progress. For African Americans, sports are used as a way for upward mobility due to racial discrimination in employment and education opportunities. Studies by Rudman (1986) have shown that most African American males that participate in intercollegiate sports feel that athletics will help them achieve their goals of playing professionally and avoiding discrimination. However, a conflict exists with intercollegiate sport's affiliation with higher education and the promotion of egalitarian principles. While higher education institutions are profiting from athletes that participate in sports, many athletes do not realize the goal of professional sports careers or an equal standard of living. While institutions gain from the commercialization of intercollegiate

athletics, football in particular, the education of African American student-athletes is compromised. Donnor (2005) believes that the “significant sums of money involved with the cost of operation and generation of revenue has created a win at any cost ethos” (p.49).

These suspicions have caused questions to surface about the motivations to diversify athletic teams. Was integration for the advancement of minorities or to promote white self-interest? Some researchers feel that *Brown v. Board of Education* 1954 was established for questionable motives. This cynicism of the *Brown* decision supports a principle established by Bell (1992), the interest-convergence principle. Donnor (2005) states, “the interest convergence principle is an analytical construct of Critical Race Theory (CRT) that explains how laws and policies established to promote equality maintain the status quo” (p. 46). “For example, CRT scholars would assert that people’s (particularly males) realization that it was to their advantage (i.e., financially) to allow talented African-Americans into their sport organizations—mostly as athletes, but in a few cases as head coaches and administrators is what motivated them to do so” (Singer, 2005, p. 370). According to Wing (1997), CRT has three major tenets:

First, racism is an ordinary and fundamental part of American society; second, a culture constructs its own self-interest (CRT’s critique of society thus often takes the form of storytelling and narrative analysis to construct alternative social realities and protest against acquiescence to unfair arrangements designed for the benefits of others); and third, CRT holds that white elites will tolerate or encourage racial progress for minorities only if doing so also promotes white self-interest. (as cited in Harrison & Lawrence, 2003, p. 376)

Applied to higher education and major athletic programs, this theory implies that African American student-athletes are allowed access to predominately white institutions because their athletic prowess helps generate revenue. Statistics confirm this notion. Harrison and Lawrence (2003) state “one out of nine African American students on predominately white campuses is a student-athlete on athletic scholarship, compared to one out of fifty White American students on

athletic scholarship” (p. 374). Additionally, this phenomenon is displayed in the wider world of sports where an overrepresentation of African American athletes exists, but the decision making positions of athletic directors, coaches, owners, and managers are still largely held by Caucasian males (Beamon, 2008). Lapchick and Matthews (2001) explain, “African American coaches in the NFL and NBA only make up 17% and 10%, respectively, of the total number of head coaches in these leagues that are largely composed of African American players” (as cited in Beamon, 2008, p. 354). Arguably, the numbers seem to indicate that African American student-athletes are given opportunities to follow, but not lead, thus being exploited by sports entities. This racial imbalance in leadership opportunities is linked to a practice called “stacking.” Smith and Henderson (2000) describe stacking as a discriminatory practice that places African American athletes in playing positions where they have less of a chance to play a leading, determining role in the outcome of a contest (as cited in Singer, 2005). Further, Smith and Henderson alleged that the “concomitant and therefore long-term effect of this practice is that African-American players have less of a chance to assume leadership positions as coaches and managers when their playing careers are over” (as cited in Singer, 2005, p. 368). According to Singer (2005), “this is problematic because the reality could potentially discourage current African American student-athletes from pursuing coaching and sport management as viable career options, especially if these athletes do not see any African American head coaches and administrators in these positions” (p. 368).

Subsequently, race affects the educational opportunities of African American student-athletes, primarily in revenue generating college sports such as football and basketball. Legal cases related to athletics and education, and how both are manipulated to further the interest of Caucasians, are displayed in *Taylor v. Wake Forest University*, 1972 and *Ross v. Creighton*,

1990. In *Taylor v. Wake Forest University*, former football player Gregg Taylor brought a lawsuit against Wake Forest University for breach of contract. In the Fall of 1967, due to a low grade point average, Taylor notified his football coach that he would not participate in spring football activities until his grades improved. Consequently, the athletic department terminated his athletic scholarship, requiring him to fund the remainder of his education. To Taylor's dismay, the court dismissed the case. Today, this case is seen as a pivotal moment in collegiate athletics by researchers. Donnor (2005) expounds:

First, the American court system recognized the written and signed communications between a student-athlete and post-secondary institution as an 'express contract,' in which both parties must meet the stated obligations. Second, as an educational matter, this case demonstrates an instance where a student-athlete's education opportunity was adversely affected by the affirmative conduct and competing interests on the part of the athletic department. (p. 55)

Moreover, the administrators' second-rate academic expectations for student-athletes were displayed. Most importantly, Taylor realized his academic performance took precedence over athletics, unlike most student-athletes at most major Division I football and basketball institutions. Additionally, the *Ross v. Creighton University*, 1990, case demonstrates how most African American males disregard or do not ascertain a convergence of interest until their eligibility is exhausted. Former basketball player Kevin Ross filed a lawsuit against Creighton University for alleged educational malpractice. Ross held that the institution had a moral obligation or implied duty to educate him at a minimum level of competence (*Ross v. Creighton University*). According to the opinion, Ross felt that the institution injured him by recruiting him to attend the school on a basketball scholarship while knowing he was unprepared academically to fulfill a college curriculum, scoring 9 points out of a possible 36 on the American College Test (ACT) when the average ACT score at Creighton during Ross' matriculation in 1978 was 23.2 (*Ross v. Creighton University*, p. 4). Furthermore, the complaint argues:



Under its rules, the university would not have accepted the pursuit of this esoteric curriculum by a non-athlete. After four years, when his basketball eligibility expired, Ross had earned only 96 of the 128 credits required to graduate, maintaining a "D" average. His reading skills were those of a seventh-grader; his overall language skills, those of a fourth-grader. In order to get Ross remedial education, representatives of Creighton made arrangements for Ross to attend Chicago's Westside Preparatory School, an elementary and high school whose founder, Marva Collins, has drawn national attention for her abilities as an educator. (*Ross v. Creighton University*, p. 4)

Ross' case was fruitless and the court ruled in favor of Creighton because "education was an intensely collaborative process, requiring the interaction of student with the teacher" (*Ross v. Creighton University*, p. 1). As it relates to CRT and the interest convergence principal, *Ross v. Creighton* helps to support critics' assertion that the athletic prowess of an African American student-athlete is more important than their academic and alternative career development. This assertion has led many researchers to search for discrepancies in educational outcomes for student-athletes. One area that has been examined by scholars is graduation rates.

### **Graduation Rates**

Graduation rates of Division I college athletes have been tracked since 1983 (Watt & Moore III, 2001). While not perfect, graduation rates are one of the best indicators of academic success in college. In most cases, consideration for a professional job requires a college degree. Many researchers (Beamon; 2008; Donnor, 2005; Harper, 2012; Harper, Williams, & Blackman, 2013; Harrison & Lawrence, 2003) note that some student-athletes are academically unprepared for college and a gap exists in the graduation rates of African American student-athletes compared to Caucasian student-athletes. In 2006 the NCAA reported that African American football players graduated from Division I institutions at a rate that was 13% lower than that of their Caucasian teammates: 62% for whites and 49% for African Americans (as cited in Beamon, 2008, p. 353). There are also significant differences in the graduation success rates of African Americans and Caucasians. Lapchick (2011c) reported that, schools playing in college football

bowl games in 2011-2012, the average graduation success rate was 81% for Whites and 61% for African Americans. While both African American and Caucasian football student-athletes graduate at higher rates than their male non-athlete peers in the student body respectively at 40% and 60%, a gap between the African American and Caucasian student still remains (Lapchick, 2011c). Due to these graduation rate gaps, new phenomena such as academic clustering are being explored.

### **Academic Clustering**

Academic clustering can be defined as grouping student-athletes in majors that are thought to have easier curriculums that do not interrupt training, practice, or competition schedules of student-athletes. Instructors that teach in these clusters are perceived to be supportive of athletic departments. In a recent study conducted by Newberry (2011) of the Associated Press, data was gathered by surveying 68 schools that received automatic bids to the Bowl Championship Series. Information was collected from media guides, university websites, and information provided from schools. According to the researcher, “at least half the football players with declared majors at a dozen other universities are bunched in two fields of study. At 22 schools, fifty percent or more are pursuing a degree from a group of three majors, which means that more than half of the schools are at the core of major college football — 39 of 68 teams — have some level of clustering” (Newberry, 2011). At Georgia Tech University, an engineering school, 43 of 62 football student-athletes are majoring in management. At Vanderbilt University, 35 of 59 football student-athletes are majoring in human and organizational development. At the University of California Los Angeles, 27 of 47 football student-athletes major in history. At Baylor University, 27 of 53 football student-athletes major in general studies. Findings about the University of Cincinnati, Mississippi State University,

Louisiana State University, and Clemson University also demonstrated a trend of clustering. According to Suggs (2003), “Whether or not they admit it, academic advisers sometimes steer athletes into specific courses and degree programs to make it easier for them to meet the NCAA’s academic standards” (as cited in Sharp and Sheilley, 2008, p. 106). Arguably, the data can be analyzed to blame both the institution and student-athlete for this phenomenon. As the court ruled in the *Ross v. Creighton University* case, education is a collaborative process; however, cynics believe that most big-time colleges do not place priority on academic achievement. While student-athletes have a responsibility to choose an area of concentration, most are like non-student-athletes on campus, who may be unsure about an academic path. This practice, where the athletic ability of a student-athlete at both the high school and university levels is emphasized, is understood to reproduce student-athletes with educational inequalities who are not prepared academically or culturally for the transition into the occupational sector (Beamon, 2008). Indisputably, student-athletes that participate in intercollegiate athletics at the Division I level have copious restrictions. Some of the restrictions involve the inability to change majors, dropping and adding courses due to eligibility rules, and taking courses or completing internships because they interfere with practice and competition schedules. Contrarily, non-athletes “have the freedom to explore courses and majors, spend time on internships, drop and add courses with changing needs and focus on finding a career that suits their abilities” (Beamon, 2008, p. 355). The underlining factor for these copious restrictions’ existence are the time demands of a Division I student-athlete.

### **Time Demands**

Total focus and discipline is needed for an athlete to reach the goal of obtaining a degree and to explore other career options. Consequently, it is difficult to focus when your body is under

stress. Former University of Minnesota center Steve Tobin, geography major with a “B” average, admitted that he dropped all but four credits during the 1978 football season because he did not have adequate time to study (Broadhead, 1992). He also said, “I’m a lineman and I have to rest at least an hour every day when I get home from practice until my headache goes away. There’s no way I can open a book” (Broadhead, 1992). After long hours of classes and a strenuous practice, fatigue becomes a factor, not allowing the student-athlete to devote the amount of energy to be successful academically (Sharp & Sheilley, 2008). This type of problem caused the implementation of new rules within the NCAA. Prior to 1991 student-athletes reported that they were investing more than thirty hours a week in their sport (Suggs, 1999). As mentioned earlier, by NCAA regulations, the total number of hours spent in athletic activities cannot total more than 20 hours per week or more than four hours per day. When you add travel time, weight lifting, film study, and time in the training room for injury, hours could seem like thirty to forty hours. Moreover, during post-season competition such as bowl games and tournaments, student-athletes are required to be on campus for practices, which forces them to miss many holidays and much needed vacation time away from sport and academia. The twenty-hour mandate is one rule that attempts to serve its purpose of allowing student-athletes more time to dedicate to academics and other college experiences. Nevertheless, scholars (Murphy, Petitpas, and Brewer, 1996) believe that the amount of time committed to intercollegiate athletics leads to psychosocial identity issues and contributes to the lack of career maturity in student-athletes.

### **Psychosocial Identity Issues**

Murphy, Petitpas, and Brewer (1996) state, “the commitment and exclusive dedication necessary to excel in sport may restrict student-athletes’ opportunities to engage in exploratory behavior” (p. 240). This increased concentration on athletics is believed to cause foreclosed

identity and athletic role identity. According to Marcia et al. (1993), individuals who make commitments to roles without engaging in exploratory behavior are said to be in a state of identity foreclosure (as cited in Murphy et al., 1996). Research done by Miller and Kerr (2003) suggests that, “identity foreclosure exists when an individual prematurely commits to a career or lifestyle without adequate exploration of available opportunities and ideologies. The individual with a foreclosed identity fails to evaluate internal needs and values and instead internalizes a socially acceptable role identity” (p. 198). Identity foreclosure presents a unique problem that directly affects the career transition dilemma. Blustein and Phillips (1990) found that identity foreclosure is associated with a dependent decision-making style, in which responsibility for important decisions (e.g. career choices) is deferred to others (as cited in Murphy et al., 1996). The research of identity foreclosure suggests that student-athletes, particularly African American male student-athletes, are underdeveloped professionally, and unable to make sound decisions on their own. For example, student-athletes that enter college may allow others (e.g. athletic academic counselors) to choose a major for them instead of trying to discover their unique gifts, talents, and interest that align with a particular field of study. Furthermore, identity foreclosure is associated with another aspect of self-identity, athletic identity, which is assumed to be germane to the career decision-making process in college student-athletes (Murphy et al., 1996). Athletic identity was conceptualized within the multidimensional theory of self-concept, which postulates that individuals make domain-specific judgments of their personal worth and competence (Miller & Kerr, 2003). Athletic identity is simply identifying oneself as only an athlete, cognitively, behaviorally, and socially. Further, it has been suggested that African American male athletes appear to suffer from this dynamic more often than other ethnicities. A study by Beamon and Bell (2002) illustrated that “African American males have higher expectations of ‘going pro’ and

have been intensively socialized toward sports and embracing the athletic identity” (as cited in Beamon, 2008, p. 354). When these dreams of going pro are not achieved, most African American male football student-athletes will suffer negative emotions such as low self-esteem, depression and anxiety. In addition to emotional damage, some of these student-athletes will not have an opportunity to complete their degrees due to their low academic standing with the university and negative reputation with the athletic department.

### **Student-Athletes’ Motivations to Go Pro**

A dream is a succession of images, thoughts, or emotions through the mind that a person experiences while asleep or awake. Most student-athletes that participate in major Division I athletics, particularly football, dream about being a professional athlete. These dreams to go pro can be attributed to the perceptions of sports in America. Sports in America are very popular. Viewers from all walks of life tune in to watch their favorite players and teams, from both colleges and professional leagues, throughout the week during sports seasons. This can be illustrated with the increase broadcasting agreements of major sports associations, conferences, and professional leagues. In a thirty-year period, the NCAA’s sale of television rights has grown from a \$50 million broadcasting agreement to the most recent agreement in 2010, which is reportedly \$10.8 billion to broadcast the NCAA Men’s Basketball Tournament over fourteen years. Additionally, the Southeastern Conference made headlines in 2008 when they solidified an agreement with ESPN and CBS for more than \$3 billion to broadcast all of their football competitions, as well as a host of other sports, over fifteen years. Professional sports leagues generate similar revenues annually. This typifies why student-athletes see sports as viable career options. As discussed earlier, “one out of nine African American students on predominately white campuses is a student-athlete on athletic scholarship, compared to one out of fifty White

American students on athletic scholarship” (Harrison & Lawrence, 2003, p. 374). Additionally, in the NFL, sixty-seven percent of players are African American (Lapchick, 2011a). According to Harrison and Lawrence (2003), this outlook and skewed depiction may cause African Americans to believe that their opportunities in sport are profitable and distort their perceptions about education and other occupational prospects (p. 374). Davis (1999) elaborates:

Pick up most American sports dailies, and along with last night’s scores, player transcripts and racing results, are page after page of the black athlete in pictures, rich, superrich, bald-headed, super bald-headed. The downside of such visceral overflow is that it creates a false sense of equity about the workplace. (p. 889)

Moreover, what makes these statistics troubling is that most student-athletes and viewers of sports are ignorant of the fact that only 1.6 percent of college student-athletes will play professional sports, concluding their careers in competitive athletics (Harrison & Lawrence, 2003). Furthermore, research suggests that the lack of people of color in professional leadership positions at predominately white institutions potentially discourages African American student-athletes from aspiring to obtain leadership positions in fields of human endeavor (Singer, 2005). In Lapchick’s (2010) longitudinal research, the *Racial and Gender Report Card* (RGRC), that assesses the hiring practices of major college and professional sports organizations in the United States, reported that “among the 120 FBS Institutions, 111 (92.5 percent) presidents were Caucasian while there were only nine presidents of color and 22 women serving as president as of October 2010” (p. 10). Additionally, the report indicated that 100 percent of conference commissioners in Division 1A were Caucasian males, only 13 of the 120 head football coaching positions were occupied by African Americans, and only 9 of the 120 athletic director positions were held by African Americans (Lapchick, 2010). Again, not seeing any African American head coaches or administrators in these management positions is problematic, causing African American student-athletes to focus only on athletic careers as a means to upward mobility

(Singer, 2005). Many examiners believe the overemphasis and serious involvement in sports have hampered and drained African American talent away from other areas of academic and occupational achievement and argue that the push toward athletics by families is deterring the social and cognitive growth of African American youth (Edwards, 2000). According to Beamon (2008),

While student-athletes often fulfill their obligation to the university by performing athletically and bringing notoriety to the universities, all too often Black students do not see the benefits of their labor by playing professionally or earning a degree. Of those who do graduate, many graduate in less marketable majors 'riddled with 'keep 'em eligible' less competitive 'jock courses' of dubious educational value and occupational relevance. (p. 354)

The expectation to go pro, and the revelation of outcomes of African American student-athletes as a result of this behavior, heightens the alleged exploitation issue of the NCAA and its member institutions. Today, more than ever, it is critical that African American student-athletes foster positive relationships with coaches, mentors and family members who understand the problems and issues that they will face as college athletes. A college education must become the primary focus and goal of every athlete. A professional career is indeed an additional blessing and opportunity, but the literature all too often reports that the reality of securing a professional career is minimal.

### **Exploitation**

While many programs in college athletics incur numerous expenses due to facilities, travel, salaries, financial aid, and equipment, funds are raised to offset these costs. Many researchers believe that African American males contribute significantly to the financial success of academies in big-time college athletic programs. Donnor (2005) writes, "Black males dominate football, which in some instances generates enough revenue to financially underwrite non-revenue producing athletic sports such as crew, swimming, tennis and golf that are



overwhelmingly populated by White middle and upper class students” (p. 48). Wins and losses in revenue generating sports, primarily football, elevate the contours of universities. Undeniably, “universities use the commercialization of their sports programs to generate revenue, increase visibility, recruit students, and receive alumni support, which creates a pressure to win” for college athletic programs (as cited in Beamon, 2008, p. 353). Moreover, the student-athletes’ financial value extends far beyond just the institution. Studies indicate that sports have a significantly positive impact on local economies where sports competitions are played. Hotels and vehicles are rented, restaurants and sports bars are filled, and extra personnel are employed in local cities to accommodate the local community and visiting guests (i.e. teams, media, fans, and families). For example, in 2011 the city of St. Louis avoided furloughs because the hometown team, the Cardinals, hosted several playoff games and won the Major League Baseball World Series in seven games, hosting the final two contests. National Public Radio reporter Maria Altman (2011) reported:

City officials say each World Series game played here brings about a half million dollars in additional sales tax revenue, most of it from ticket sales and concessions. The first two games of the World Series, plus the playoff games, have brought what Mayor Slay calls a windfall, allowing him to cancel unpaid days off for city employees called furloughs. It's a cost-saving measure that would have affected 2,700 employees. (Transcript section, para. 4)

Furthermore, these same economic gains from student-athletes’ athletic abilities can be seen in major college football’s powerhouse conferences, where the majority of the exploitation scrutiny has been directed. These conferences are the SEC, Big Ten (Big 10), Big Twelve (Big 12), Pacific 12 (Pac 12), Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), Big East Conference (BE), Western Athletic Conference (WAC), Conference USA (C-USA), Mid-American Conference (MAC), Mountain West Conference (MWC), Sun Belt Conference (SBC), and independent participant Notre Dame (ND). These conferences make up the Bowl Championship Series (BCS), which is a

showcase designed to feature five games in hopes that the top two teams in the country will compete against one another in the football national championship. The BCS is very profitable to the conferences and member institutions that participate in the series. According to the BCS website, “each conference whose team qualifies automatically for the BCS receives approximately \$18 million in net revenue. A second team qualifying brings an additional \$4.5 million to its conference. Notre Dame receives approximately \$1.3 million. Army and Navy also receive \$100,000 each, and the NCAA's Football Championship Subdivision conferences share approximately \$2 million” (Bowl Championship Series, 2010). Additionally, host cities for these BCS games reported that the economic impact was more than \$1.2 billion. Based on these numbers, it is understandable why skeptics believe that these institutions function as modern day cartels.

As the governing body of major college sports, the NCAA and its member institutions regulate market values of student-athletes functioning as a monopsony. Stieber (1991) states:

In the market place, whenever this kind of situation exists, the monopsonist (the NCAA) seeks to pay the monopolist (the student-athlete) a wage rate that is less than he or she would receive if the bidding process were not shut down. The monopolist, on the other hand seeks a wage rate at a level equal to that which he or she would receive if the various colleges and universities had to bid against one another. For some athletes, such as an All American candidate, the difference between his or her true market value and a scholarship granted by a collusive monopsonist can be a lot of money. At the present time, these monies go to the colleges and universities instead of the student-athlete and his or her family. (p. 448)

This current system of amateur athletics causes conflict within institutions due to its contradictory standards. Non-student-athletes with special talents (e.g. musicians, actors, and dancers) who attend universities on scholarship for their abilities are allowed to receive monetary support for their skills outside of the institution while student-athletes cannot due to NCAA sanctions. Not to mention, in the performing and studio arts disciplines, college instructors might

not be required to have the customary PhD terminal degree to teach if there is a track record of excellence supported by their patricians (Brand, 2006). Conversely, a student-athlete that has played professionally would not be allowed to coach or hold a sports administration position in an athletic program without obtaining a college degree. These inequalities have drawn the interest of researchers. In a study that sought the viewpoints of 20 former student-athletes concerning the universities' role in the alleged exploitation of student-athletes, 18 of 20 participants felt they had given far more than they had gained from the institution and were unprepared for alternative careers; several others felt like 'athlete-students'; 14 of 20 emphasized the word "used," such as "used up" and "used goods," to describe the treatment they received from the academics; and 15 of 20 talked about selecting academic disciplines with classes that were "easy to pass" (Beamon, 2008). These observations of academic and athletic exploitation of student-athletes are perceived to have an impact on the acuties of student-athletes by faculty members at higher education institutions.

### **Faculty Perceptions of Student-Athletes**

At most major Division I institutions, it is believed that athletic achievement is emphasized by stakeholders more than academic success. Stereotypes of student-athletes as "dumb jocks" or as "not serious about their education" have consistently plagued the collegiate community, and have emanated from both the student body and the faculty (as cited in Melendez, 2008). A great number of faculty members on campuses believe "that sports distort the mission of institutions of higher learning" (Brand, 2006, p. 9). This presents the issue of educational inequality which affects the ability of student-athletes to transition successfully into alternative careers post-college. To combat these past and current negative perceptions of faculty at academies, the NCAA mandates that its member institutions have academic support programs.

Academic support programs have become an important source of development for student-athletes. In 1991, the NCAA membership passed legislation requiring all institutions to provide academic counseling services to all student-athletes (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2009). The support programs are designed to prepare athletes for life beyond sports competition. Additionally, Sandeen (1996) indicates that the purpose of a career program is to help students learn about their own interests and skills and develop plans that fit their career and personal needs. One particular program that is available for athletes at universities is the Challenging Athletic Minds for Personal Success (CHAMPS)/Life Skills program. CHAMPS/Life Skills' intent is to enhance student-athletes' postsecondary experience, encourage student-athletes to complete their degree, and help student-athletes develop skills that will serve them for life (Carodine, Almond, & Gratto, 2001). Examples of universal programs conducted through CHAMPS would be seminars on resume building, interview skills, and financial education. Also, most student-athlete development programs organize community service projects for the student-athletes.

Although academic and life skill support programs are provided to student-athletes, the motives for their existence raise concerns for faculty. Due to the NCAA legislation of Academic Progress Rate (APR), Division I institutions have become increasingly concerned with keeping their student-athletes eligible and their sports programs from incurring penalties. According to NCAA Academic Performance Metrics (2011), "the APR metric is intended to provide more real-time feedback on the progress of student-athletes toward graduation. Each semester APR tracks retention and eligibility for each student-athlete on athletics financial aid" (p. 6). While this stricter policy's intention was to improve progress toward a degree, it has caused some academic support programs to participate in the previously discussed alleged theory of academic

clustering. These misleading motives of athletic departments have led many faculty members on university campuses to become anti-athletics.

Moreover, “academic fraud; academically underperforming student-athletes; growing athletics department budgets; large compensation packages for some coaches; student-athletes, coaches, and even presidents misbehaving, and many other issues fuel this discontent” of faculty members on campuses (Brand, 2006, p. 13). Most of these factors listed above affect the perception of faculty members toward student-athletes. Furthermore, at most institutions of higher learning, it is understood that concessions need to be made for student-athletes traveling and participating in university sponsored events such as games and post-season play. However, some faculty members at universities do not support class absences, especially, from the student-athlete population. In 2007, at a Faculty Summit on Intercollegiate Athletics conducted by the Knight Commission, 2,701 faculty members of Division I-A institutions were surveyed in regards to academic issues. The survey found that almost forty percent of the faculty believed that athletes were not motivated to earn their degree (Sharp & Sheilley, 2008). Lack of support for the student-athlete from faculty members could possibly have a major impact on a student-athlete’s pursuit of a degree or career development opportunities.

### **Transition Theory**

The change from athlete to non-athlete can be difficult for athletes. Shahnasarian (1992) reports that over sixty percent of players who retired from professional football (NFL) since 1970 described the experience being accompanied with emotional and personal problems (p. 299). The problems mentioned were relational, financial, physical, and occupational. While the Shahnasarian (1992) article speaks to professional athletes, these professional football players were once college student-athletes. Knowing that only a small percentage of collegiate football

student-athletes will enter the professional ranks raises concerns about the emotional and personal well-being of those collegiate student-athletes who experience the conclusion of an athletic career. In essence, the end of a collegiate or professional football career brings a unique set of challenges. These changes can be described as transitions. Nancy Schlossberg is credited with the development of Transition Theory. The theory “provides insights into factors related to the transition, the individual, and the environment that are likely to determine the degree of impact a given transition will have at a particular point in time” (Evans et al., 1998, p. 107). Schlossberg et al. (1995) define transition as “any event, or non-event, that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles” (as cited in Evans et al., 1998, p. 111). Additionally, the theory addresses how individuals deal or cope with occurrences (Komives & Woodard, 2003). Meaning is also given to transitions that take place in the lives of people. As mentioned earlier, they are classified into three types: Type, Context, and Impact (Evans et al., 1998). Type refers to transitions that are anticipated (predictable), unanticipated (unpredictable), and nonevents (an event likely to happen that does not happen) (Evans et al., 1998). Type speaks about changes that happen to individuals as they transition from one stage of life to the next. Context defines the relationship associated with the transition and the setting. Impact explains the adjustments made by the individual as a result of the transition. The process of transition happens over a period of time. These stages in the process involve individuals moving in, through, and out of events or non-events (Evans et al., 1998). Furthermore, the theory identifies factors that impact a person’s ability to handle a transition and are “influenced by a ratio of assets and liabilities in regard to four sets of factors: situation, self, support, and strategies” (Evans et al., 1998, p. 115).

## **Conclusion**

Without a doubt, sports have provided great opportunities for African Americans to unite as a community and advance socially in American culture. Most African American males feel that they would not have been able to attend college without sports (Beamon, 2008). However, when one avenue to achievement becomes the focus and is recognized as success, success is redefined and other accomplishments are diluted. This inaccurate standard of success has paralyzed countless African American male student-athletes at Division I institutions, hindering them from developing the total person.

In conclusion, these factors and assumptions about college athletes may possibly have an effect on African American Division I-A football student-athletes' abilities to transition to alternative careers other than sports. Research (Flowers, 2009) reveals that sports were once insignificant to higher education, but later grew, affecting popular culture and commercializing education through sports competitions. This impact on American society legitimized the working-class athlete, breeding a win at all cost ethos that potentially led to the integration of sports. The true motives to compete for notoriety continue to hide behind Egalitarian principles, causing the development of theories on racist practices toward African Americans to arise. Racism towards African American student-athletes seems to complicate their career decisions and places limitations on their career potential, leading to low graduation rates. Not graduating hinders the student-athlete's ability to gain employment, especially during harsh economic times. Furthermore, low academic performance causes athletic programs to group athletes into majors considered to be "easy" due to athletic interest and time constraints. The time demands placed on student-athletes to fulfill their athletic obligations create an imbalance, which negatively affects academic success and alternative career exploration. As a result, student-athletes develop identity

issues that may limit their abilities to explore substantial career opportunities. Moreover, the unwillingness of the male student-athlete to pay attention to NCAA and NFL statistics about his diminutive chances of playing in the NFL, because of the false perception of equal opportunity in the job market created by the media, has the potential to have detrimental effects on the student-athlete's intellectual and career maturity, producing a milieu of manipulation. Exploiting student-athletes creates an environment of mistrust for not only student-athletes against athletics, but for faculty regarding athletic programs and their student-athletes. Lastly, these negative faculty perceptions of athletic programs possibly subject student-athletes to unfair treatment. Despite these challenging issues, African American Division I football student-athletes must find a way to make the most out of their higher education opportunity by using the vehicle of sports to advance both educationally and economically.



### CHAPTER III

#### METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the design of the study. Using a purposeful sample of African American, former Division I football student-athletes, who also played professional football in the National Football League (NFL), the phenomenological qualitative study explored the experiences, perceptions, and beliefs regarding the subjects' collegiate experience and career transition after sports. Topics examined included issues of race and social interaction, academic preparation, economic status, leadership opportunities, and the transitions from collegiate and professional sports. Subjects were asked to reflect on the choice of academic major, progress and performance in the classroom, the time demands of sports, athletic identity, and the collegiate experience and post-athletic career transition. The purpose of the research design developed for this research was to answer the following research questions:

Central Question:

What are the experiences and perceptions of African American male football student-athletes at Division I institutions who played professional football concerning their collegiate experience and the transition from athletics to non-playing careers?

Sub-questions:

- a) What are the experiences and perceptions of former African American athletes at Division I institutions who played professional football concerning their collegiate

- experience and the relationship between their post-playing career and race and social interaction?
- b) What are the experiences and perceptions of former African American athletes at Division I institutions who played professional football concerning their collegiate experience and the relationship between their post-playing career and academic preparation?
  - c) What are the experiences and perceptions of former African American athletes at Division I institutions who played professional football concerning their collegiate experience and the relationship between their post-playing career and economic status?
  - d) What are the experiences and perceptions of former African American athletes at Division I institutions who played professional football concerning their collegiate experience and the relationship between their post-playing career and leadership opportunities?

While the research question guided this study, this study also incorporated an emergent design (Patton, 2002) that allowed unanticipated questions and issues to be explored. Emergent design allows the design of the research to evolve as subjects identify new issues and concerns in the study (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). Emergent design studies are also flexible, giving the researcher an opportunity to gain the subjects' viewpoint through probing questions (Flick, 2009).

According to Patton (2002), "phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of everyday experiences" (p.104). Critical Race Theory (Bell, 1992; Brown, 2003; Landson-Billings, 1998; Milner, 2007; Wing, 1997) and Transition Theory (Evans

et al., 1998) provided theoretical lenses to analyze and understand issues of race and critical life-transitions common to highly successful African American athletes.

The research design presented in this chapter includes a description of the participants and setting, procedures used to collect the data, instruments used for data collection, and methods used to analyze the data.

### **Participants and Setting**

The participants for this study were former NFL players who attended college and played collegiately at NCAA predominately white Division I institutions in the Southern Regional Education Board member states in the United States. The athletes chosen were from university members of the Bowl Championship Series (BCS). Former student-athletes from these institutions were selected because the level of competition is considered the highest in non-professional football. Furthermore, these institutions have rich athletic traditions and records of national success. Participants were selected using qualitative purposeful and snowball sampling methods. Purposeful sampling provides the researcher an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being examined (Patton, 2002). Purposeful sampling allows the researcher to select participants that are likely to yield information-rich accounts with respect to the purpose of the study (Gall et al., 2007). Snowball sampling uses participants to make referrals to the researcher about prospective participants who may add to the depth and richness of the data (Patton, 2002). Snowball sampling is consistent with emergent design by providing the researcher the opportunity to further examine issues that are raised in initial discussions. These referred participants can provide more information-rich narratives to the study (Gall et al., 2007). Participants selected for the study provided credible and relevant information. As the researcher,

previous experience as a former student-athlete and NFL employee aided in selecting participants along with the analysis, interpretation, and presentation of the data.

## **Procedure**

The principal researcher gained the approval from the dissertation committee and the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects to conduct the study. After approvals were acquired, six participants were recruited via letters, phone calls, text messages, and emails. All the participants were African American former student-athletes that played professionally at BCS level Division I predominately white institutions from the Southern Regional Education Board member states. The number of participants selected gave the researcher an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena. Once contact was made with the participants, phone pre-interviews were scheduled with the participants to inform them of the purpose of the research and the time commitment participation required.

Additionally, demographic data was collected (see Appendix D). Participation required a day and a half commitment to be interviewed (focus group and individual) at a central location. The central location was a hotel conference center in the Southeastern region. Travel accommodations (i.e. hotel, per diem, and travel stipend) were provided to the participants by the principal researcher. During the day-and-a-half interviews, each participant was asked to read and sign a consent form. After consent was gained, data was collected using focus group sessions and individual interviews.

The first activity at the central location was the two-hour focus group session. Following the group session, individual in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant to strengthen the study and achieve triangulation (Patton, 2002). The focus group technique helped to build trust and establish rapport with the participants (Singer, 2009).

Furthermore, the focus group session helped to stimulate conversation, raise ideas, allow the participants to interact, and help the researcher assess views of the participants (Patton, 2002). See Appendix E for the focus group protocol. The individual interviews gave the participants the opportunity to speak in confidence about issues they may not have felt comfortable sharing during the focus group session. Additionally, the researcher was able to gain a more in-depth understanding of each participant's experiences during the individual interviews (Patton, 2002). Patton (2002) highlights that interviewing allows the researcher to gain the perspective of others. According to Creswell (2009), interviews are useful "when participants cannot be directly observed" and allow participants to "provide historical information" (p. 179). Additionally, interviewing will give the researcher autonomy to ask related questions to better understand the phenomena being studied (Creswell, 2009).

The interviews lasted no longer than two hours. Each interview was recorded with an audio/video device. After the interviews were completed, the interviews were transcribed verbatim. Member checking was also utilized to add credibility to the research (Flick, 2009). Member checking allows the subjects in the study to review a copy of their personal interview transcription to ensure validity of the information transcribed. Each participant was emailed a draft of the transcript from the focus group and individual interviews and asked to review it for accuracy or anything they did not wish to be included. In addition, at the conclusion of the research, prior to formal presentation and/or publication, participants were provided an opportunity to review the findings and state any concerns or objections. After the participants reviewed the transcriptions, themes were identified and categorized for analysis.

The researcher utilized the interview protocol (see Appendix G) to gather essential information for the study. Using an interview guide, questions and issues to be explored were

prepared. According to Patton (2002), “the advantage to an interview guide is that it makes sure that the interviewer/evaluator has carefully decided how best to use the limited time available in an interview situation” (p. 343). The other advantages of using interviewing are emergent design and flexibility. Emergent design allows the design of the research to evolve as subjects identify new issues and concerns in the study (Gall et al., 2007). Flexibility gives the researcher an opportunity to gain the subjects’ viewpoint through probing questions (Flick, 2009). Appendix F lists the individual interview schedule.

### **Instrument**

It is common in phenomenological qualitative research for the researcher to be viewed as the instrument. As a result, the background, transparency, and integrity of the researcher added to the credibility of the study (Patton, 2002). I have over eight years of experience as an athletic administrator (i.e. conference, NFL, and BCS Division I institution) and five years’ playing experience at the BCS Division I level. As a current athletic administrator and former student-athlete, I have witnessed collegiate and professional athletes struggle with life changes at the conclusion of their collegiate and professional athletic careers. Furthermore, I have witnessed coaches, administrators, organizations, parents of collegiate and professional athletes, and collegiate and professional athletes neglect opportunities to prepare for careers outside of playing sports. With that said, it was paramount that I was consistently aware of my biases concerning the phenomena and that I remained neutral when conducting this research study. While this research was designed to add to the body of knowledge on the career transition of African American collegiate and professional athletes from sport to other occupations, I also desired solutions to aid current and former student-athletes, coaches, and athletic administrators. Even though my intent in conducting this study is to improve the preparation of athletes to transition to

post-playing careers, steps have been taken to accurately represent the voices, narratives, and views of the subjects. Member checking was used to accomplish this goal. As Glesne (2006) states, “sharing interview transcripts, analytical thoughts, and/or drafts of the final report with the research participants to make sure you are representing their ideas accurately” will improve validity (p. 38).

### **Methods of Analyses**

Upon completion of the focus groups and interviews, each of the recorded focus group and interview sessions were transcribed. Next, a content analysis was performed on the transcriptions to categorize the information and identify major themes. The player interviews were analyzed and discussed using Critical Race Theory and Transition Theory around the four research sub-questions based on the sensitizing concepts listed in Cooper’s (2012) study: race and social interaction, academic preparation, economic status, and leadership opportunities. The data was organized, interpreted, and reported based on the issues raised through the discussion of the sensitizing concepts and additional concepts revealed through the emerging design. Issues were based on key concepts or concerns illuminated by the participants (Patton, 2002, p. 439). Sensitizing concepts are the “categories that the analyst brings to the data” (Patton, 2002, p. 456). According to Patton (2002), “phenomenological analysis seeks to grasp and elucidate the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of a phenomenon for a person or group of people” (p. 482). Phenomenology applied to this study of career transition focused on exploring and portraying the experiences of former African American male Division I football student-athletes through their interpretations.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this chapter presented the methodology of the study. It included a detailed description of the participants and setting, procedure for collecting data, instrument, and methods of analyses. The following chapter will present the results from the data analysis.



## CHAPTER IV

### RESEARCH FINDINGS

The focus of this study is to examine how African American male football players at Division I institutions perceived their collegiate experience and their own career transitions at the end of their athletic careers. The findings of the study, from interviews with six former African American male National Football League (NFL) players who attended college and played collegiately at NCAA predominately white Division I institutions in the Southern Regional Education Board member states, are presented in this chapter. The participants agreed to disclose their identities, which are provided in this chapter, to make this study more meaningful to readers. The actual lived experiences and perceptions of the former student-athletes are disclosed through their responses. The results presented in this chapter provide thick and rich narratives of what it is like to be an African American athlete at a Division I institution and transition from an athlete to a non-playing career. This chapter provides the backgrounds of the participants and identifies major themes found in the responses. A summary of the findings concludes this chapter.

#### **Background of Participants**

Six retired NFL players who attended college and played collegiately at NCAA predominately white Division I institutions in states included in the Southern Regional Education Board participated in this study. The cooperation and dedication of the participants in this project was instrumental in providing the opportunity to share their stories and provide them a voice. A

participant profile summary provided background information to understand the perceptions and lived experiences of the participants. Participants' names are: Tre Stallings (Tre), Dr. Bradley Ekwerekwu (Brad), Eddie Kennison, III (Eddie), Kolby Smith (Kolby), Dr. Tommy Jackson (Tommy), and Kendrell Bell (Kendrell).

All of the research participants grew up in the Southeastern region of the United States and were scholarship student-athletes at the institutions they attended. Four of the six participants graduated from the institutions they attended. The other two left college early to pursue NFL careers and have not returned to finish their degrees. Two of the four graduates continued their education and hold doctorate degrees. Additionally, four of the six participants grew up in single parent households or homes without their biological fathers present during childhood. All but one of the participants communicated that they grew up in low socioeconomic environments (low income, occupation, and education). The participants combined for a total of 31 years in professional sports (NFL), which equates to an average of 5.2 years. This number is higher than the average playing career reported by the NFL since one of the participants played 13 years in the NFL. Four of the six subjects were drafted and two signed to play for teams as undrafted free agents. Moreover, all of the participants played for two or more teams during their tenure in the NFL. Four of the six participants played different positions (offensive line, linebacker, running back, defensive line) at their respective institutions and NFL teams while the other two played the same position (wide receiver). Uniquely, all of the participants played for the Kansas City Chiefs Football Club during their football career. The participants' ages ranged from 27-40. The participants are presented in the following order: Tre Stallings (Tre), Dr. Bradley Ekwerekwu (Brad), Eddie Kennison, III (Eddie), Kolby Smith (Kolby), Dr. Tommy Jackson (Tommy), and Kendrell Bell (Kendrell).

## **Tre Stallings**

Tre is a 30-year-old husband and father of one. He is from McComb, Mississippi, which is located about an hour south of the state capitol (Jackson) of Mississippi. Tre grew up in a home with both of his parents present. At Southpike High School in Magnolia, Mississippi, Tre was a standout student-athlete in football earning many accolades for his athletic prowess. In 2001, he chose to attend the University of Mississippi on athletic scholarship to play football as an offensive lineman. While at the University of Mississippi (2001-2005), Tre majored in and graduated with a degree in mathematics. Additionally, he was a four-year starter for the football team. In the spring of 2006, his childhood dream to play professional football in the National Football League (NFL), like his father, came true. He was drafted by the Kansas City Chiefs in the sixth round. During his tenure in the NFL, Tre played with two clubs, the Kansas City Chiefs and Baltimore Ravens, for a total of four years. Currently, Tre is working in sports administration for the Southeastern Conference as the Assistant Director of Championships.

## **Dr. Bradley Ekwerekwu**

Brad is a 27-year-old single male, who is currently engaged to be married. He is from Arlington, Texas. For the most part of Brad's life, he grew up in a single parent household. His father was incarcerated when he was six years of age. At Arlington High School, Brad was a standout wide receiver on the gridiron. His athletic ability led to scholarship offers from numerous Division I institutions. He chose to attend the University of Missouri in 2003. While at Missouri, Brad was a three-year starter. He majored in finance and graduated in 2006. In May of 2007, he reached the NFL by signing with the Kansas City Chiefs as a free agent. Later in 2007 he was released by the Chiefs and signed with the Indianapolis Colts where he completed his career after the 2007 season. After Brad's playing career concluded, he returned to the University

of Missouri to complete his Masters in Gifted Education (2010) and his Doctorate in Health Education and Wellness Promotion (2012). Currently, Brad is working in education with a private foundation.

### **Eddie Kennison, III**

Eddie is a 40-year-old husband and father of three children. He is from Lake Charles, Louisiana. Eddie grew up in a single parent home for some of his life. His father was in the military serving tours for most of his life, but his parents divorced when he reached junior high school. In high school (Washington-Marion High School), Eddie was a decorated two-sport athlete in both football and track, earning Parade All-American honors in football. He decided to attend Louisiana State University (LSU) on a football scholarship. He also ran track during his time (1992-1996) in college and was on the track team that won the 1994 NCAA Outdoor Track and Field Championship. As a sprinter, he was a six-time All-America selection. While at LSU, Eddie majored in physical therapy. Eddie's athleticism led him to enter the 1996 NFL Draft after his junior football season. In the spring of 1996, Eddie reached his dream of playing in the NFL. He was selected 18<sup>th</sup> overall in the first round by the St. Louis Rams. Eddie had an extensive successful career as wide receiver in the NFL. He played for thirteen seasons with five clubs (St. Louis Rams, New Orleans Saints, Chicago Bears, Denver Broncos, and Kansas City Chiefs). He officially retired from football in July of 2010 as a member of the Kansas City Chiefs. Currently, Eddie is a successful entrepreneur starting, growing, owning, and selling many businesses. Some businesses of note are his Cellar and Lott Wine Club, 810 Zone, and the Quick Start Foundation which raises money for lupus research.

## **Kolby Smith**

Kolby is a 28-year-old male, who was just recently married. He is from Tallahassee, Florida. He grew up with both of his parents his entire childhood. At James S. Rickards High School, Kolby was a two-sport standout football and track athlete. After high school, Kolby chose to attend the University of Louisville (2003-2007) on a football scholarship. While at Louisville, Kolby played running back and shared time in the backfield with other players for most of his career. However, during his senior season, he became the starter after an injury sidelined co-star Michael Bush. Academically, Smith majored in sports administration and graduated with his degree in 2007. In the spring of 2007, Kolby reached a childhood dream of becoming an NFL player, as he was drafted in the fifth round (148<sup>th</sup> overall) by the Kansas City Chiefs. During Kolby's three-year NFL tenure, he played with the Kansas City Chiefs, Denver Broncos, and Jacksonville Jaguars. Currently, Kolby is an assistant football coach (running backs) at Western Kentucky University.

## **Dr. Tommy Jackson**

Tommy is a 29-year-old husband and father of one child. He grew up in rural Alabama in the city of Opelika. Like Brad Ekwerekwu, Tommy grew up in a single parent home for most of his life after his father was incarcerated. At Opelika High School, Tommy was a great athlete who earned many accolades. He competed in wrestling, track, and football. For his football skills, he was offered a scholarship to play defensive line at Auburn University. During his time (2002-2005) at Auburn University, Tommy majored in and graduated with a degree in public administration. In the spring of 2006, Tommy reached his goal of playing in the NFL, signing with the Atlanta Falcons as an undrafted free agent. He played for the Falcons for one year before he was signed to the Kansas City Chiefs practice squad in 2007. He went on to play for

the Chiefs until 2009. After his stint with the Chiefs and three years in the league, Tommy turned down an opportunity to continue his football career and returned to Auburn University to complete his masters (Adult Education) and doctorate (Educational Foundations, Leadership, and Technology) degrees. In 2013, Tommy completed his doctorate. Currently, Tommy works in sports administration for his alma mater in Student-athlete Support Services.

### **Kendrell Bell**

Kendrell is a 34-year-old husband and father of four children. He was adopted by his grandparents and raised in Augusta, Georgia. At Lucy Craft Laney High School, Bell was a three-sport athlete in football, basketball, and track and field. After high school, Kendrell played football at Middle Georgia Junior College. After two years in junior college, he signed with University of Georgia (UGA) to play linebacker. While at UGA (1999-2000), Kendrell majored in child and family development/sports studies and leadership. In the 2001 NFL Draft, he was selected by the Pittsburgh Steelers in the second round (39<sup>th</sup> pick overall). During his rookie season with the Steelers, Bell received the NFL Rookie of the Year Award, made the All-Pro team, and was selected to the Pro Bowl. Bell played for the Steelers for four years and then signed with the Kansas City Chiefs, where he played another three seasons before retiring from the NFL in 2007 due to injury. Currently, Bell is an entrepreneur, with many real estate properties and other investments.

### **Major Themes**

Based on the analysis of the interview data in this research study, six major themes were identified. The themes will be discussed as follows: 1) The Importance of Football, 2) The Academic Smokescreen, 3) Issues of Race, 4) Economic Hardships, 5) Student-Athlete Rights, and 6) Difficult Transitions and Identity Issues.

**Importance of Football.** As mentioned in the Introduction, a Harris Interactive Poll (Corso, 2012) found that football is America's most popular sport. The results of this research supported Corso's findings and revealed the importance of football as one of the salient themes emerging from the focus group and individual interviews. Findings by Beamon (2008) illustrated that African Americans are socialized into sports at an early age, have high expectations of playing professional sports, and embrace the athletic identity. It was evident in this study that football is important to the subjects. Eddie commented:

Football growing up, it's all I knew. It's one of three sports that was available to me growing up. It was football, it was basketball, and it was track, and I just chose football. And then football just happened to be that stepping stone that, when the Friday night lights came on, things just begin to happen. And that was kind of the direction that I focused on and I was pushed in. I was always told, you're good at this, you're good at football.

While the story of how each got involved in football was different, the sentiment was the same.

Brad noted, "Growing up in Texas, I mean, it is what it is. You hear the jokes and the rants about Friday night lights and all that, it's a way of life down there." Kolby shared:

I was five years old when I started playing football out in the streets in front of the house. At five years old, I was out there, all the kids were older than me by a minimum of two years and it's what I had fun at, at a young age.

Tommy, who was always energetic and passionate about his responses, commented:

I remember when I was in the third grade, I was on the bus and I yelled out, "I'm going to play pro football and that's it," because again, that's what you think you're going to do, that's what you think you are here to do, to be honest. So you play football when you're young and you go play ball out.

Tre had a father who played in the National Football League for the St. Louis Cardinals as well as some uncles who played in college. He discussed the influence of his family on his decision to play football. Tre said, "I think I was fortunate enough to have a Dad who actually played in the league, so it was just kind of, I guess, natural for me, watching my Dad being able to play."

Similar to Tre, Kendrell credited his family with getting him involved in the sport of football. Kendrell went on to say, “I pretty much got into football when my grandfather made me play to keep me out of the streets or what not. I had an older brother who actually played football. He was two years ahead of me.” This appreciation for the game continued throughout the interviews.

While being socialized into sports early factored into the research participants’ decisions to pursue football, five of the participants also described football as an opportunity for upward mobility. Football gave each of the participants an opportunity to go to college and pursue a career in professional sports. Eddie said, “Football just happened to be that one stepping stone, that I had an opportunity to go to college....I mean, the opportunity for education was there, but the main focus for me, and all that I knew, was getting to the next level to be able to make some money. That was the focus.” Kendrell also made mention of the opportunities football gave him. He noted:

I enjoyed playing football. Football gave me an opportunity to pursue higher education, gave me the opportunity to meet people like you guys. There are a lot of opportunities that I got that I don’t want to get into, but the opportunity to make money in the professional football league. And like I said before, I really enjoyed just playing it. And that's what it's really given me, given me the ability to provide for my family.

Tre, who is very proud of his father as a man and role model, spoke of the opportunities football gave him. He said, “I did think it [football] was going to provide me an opportunity to go to school just because I had seen it done before. I knew where my dad came from. I knew he played ball. I knew he was provided an opportunity to go to college and go to the NFL.” Kolby also responded about the opportunities football gave him and his focus to graduate from college. Kolby remarked, “I mean, academically, I don't think I could have earned an academic scholarship, but athletically, I knew that was a way for me to earn a scholarship to pursue my



career in college football.” Brad commented about his mentors’ thoughts regarding the avenues sports provided him. He spoke:

Others were saying like, “Hey, I don’t know if you know or not, but this thing could be really big and the potential for you to have these big-time scholarships is there.” And again, as I got older and older, my talent started to mature more and more, and maybe it was just the luck of the draw, but numerous scholarship opportunities came my way and then that’s when I really had to rely on the advice of my mentors who were saying things like, “Look, this is your way out. This is going to be the way you pave your own way and effectively turn around and save your family.”

Interestingly, Tommy did not believe football would give him the only opportunity to pursue an education. He came from a military background and figured that serving his country would have opened the door for him to graduate from college. Tommy explained:

I thought I was going to try to get in the military, to be honest with you. My mom was in the military, all my uncles were in the military, my granddad was in the military and my granduncle, both of them, like, in World War II or whatever. My uncle Norman was a Marine and a navy guy. So I guess he did both or whatever, so I was kind of like, “Hey, that’s what I’m going to do.” One of my closest cousins, who I call a brother, he’s in the air force so I was like, “Yeah, I’m probably going to end up going to the military more than likely.” By the time I was a junior and I got my first offer from, like, LSU or whatever, I said, “Oh, I guess I can do something with this.” And then from that, they came along so, again, I don’t want to necessarily say that it was going to be my only way, but I just kind of felt like if I went to the military, I was going to college that way.

The benefits of attending college are pretty clear to those who generally attend or have the opportunity do so. These benefits include learning, networking, and getting a job opportunity, to name a few. However, sometimes the general population’s perspective about the student-athlete experience can be misrepresented. The very phrase “student-athlete” to the research participants is nothing but a smokescreen to the outside world for the real reason why most of them are in college.

**The Academic Smokescreen.** The word student-athlete should reflect what it says. Clearly, it means an athlete is a student first and an athlete second. In essence, academics must take priority over athletics. Unfortunately, many critics (Branch, 2011; Stieber, 1991; Yost,

2010; Zimbalist, 1999) of large college athletic programs share the perception that student-athletes are athletes first and students second, and that the term student-athlete is utilized to deflect negativity away from the amateurism issue. The amateur status of student-athletes limits their opportunities to be compensated for their athletic ability. The view that athletics is primary is an easy perception to embrace due to the changes that have occurred in the duration of sports seasons, going from seasonal to year-round, and the emphasis placed on winning by media, fans, alumni, athletic departments, and coaches.

The amount of time spent on athletic related activities is an indicator of priorities. A research survey by Wolverton (2008) stated, “major-college football players reported spending an average of 44.8 hours a week practicing, playing, or training for their sport” (as cited in Sharp & Sheilley, 2008). The participants in this study supported this research and spoke passionately about how much time they spent on football related activities in college. Tre stated:

All my time! All my time was spent on football. All my time was spent on football. Not some of it, not a little bit of it, but most all my time, because I did have to go to class in order to be able to play football, but when you look at it from a 24-hour aspect: So we wake up at 6 o'clock in the morning, have weights, we go to class from maybe an 8 o'clock class, 10 o'clock class, 11 o'clock class. So, there's 3 hours of class, 50 minutes per class, but I had weights from 6 to 8, so there was already 2 hours of football. So, from 11 to 12, basically trying to get us something to eat. From 12 to 1 or 2, we're in meetings. Two o'clock to 2:30, you get dressed in the locker room, 3 o'clock, we're hitting the field and from 3 to 5:30 to 6, we are practicing, 6:30 to 7, you're trying to take a shower or looking at more film before you leave the facility. Eight o'clock you're trying to get to study hall, if you have study hall. I didn't have study hall because I was a good student. So, I'm getting back to my dorm at 9, 10 o'clock at night and it's time to go to sleep and wake up and do it again the next day.

Without hesitation, Kolby said:

It's 24/7. It's 24/7. That's part of the process. A lot of people in my position, they may not agree with that, but we must realize and understand football is the reason we are here. Our God-given talents have allowed us to be at that particular campus, and given that, that's where we've got to invest the majority of our time.

Eddie also echoed the sentiments of the other participants when he commented, "If we're looking at percent-wise, let's just say, out of 100%; 98% of it was spent on football." Kendrell added, "The demand in sports is far more than the hours that are recorded because you and I both know, I thought more about football than my academics, than my grades, or anything." Tommy remarked, while smiling, but yet serious:

That took the majority of my time. Yeah, you want to study but you better know what's going on when they call "blaze out mash." So when he calls it, you don't bust. Because if you bust, you're going to get it. You will not get back out there. And honestly for us, that's a sense of pride. You want to play, man, and you suit up, you're going to be out there playing. And we spent a lot of time learning playbooks and working out and practicing and all those things. You're going to do more of that than anything else when you're a football student-athlete.

Lastly, Brad spoke:

So yeah, let's break it down. There's 24 hours in a day. Let's say ideally you get eight of them for sleep, you're down to 16. I'll give you three meals a day. You're at an hour each; you're down to 13 hours. Let's say you're in class for three to five hours of that day. You're down to eight hours. Within those eight hours, I would say the majority of them are spent on football-related activities. I say on an easy day, maybe four hours and on that tough day, you're not expected to, but you're expected to put in upwards six, seven, eight hours a day.

While the subjects talked about the time demands of a college football athlete, concerns about eligibility surfaced as well during the interviews.

Maintaining a student-athlete's eligibility is uniquely important for coaches, student-athletes, and administrators. Simply stated, if a student-athlete does not meet NCAA standards, which is the Academic Progress Rate (APR), a student-athlete can be suspended from (ineligible for) competition. Additionally, athletic departments and respective teams can suffer penalties if their teams do not meet the NCAA standards. The APR rule replaced the old NCAA standard of continuing eligibility, where student-athletes were required to pass a certain amount of credits,

resulting in class standing. Currently, the APR rule requires that student-athletes pass a certain number of credit hours toward a specific degree.

Most of the participants in the study felt that academics were not important to their coaches, except when it came down to them being eligible. When asked if academics were important to their coaches, the responses for the participants were similar. Kendrell said, “No. Well, I’ll just say, important to the point of staying eligible.” Brad said, “No, absolutely not. Academics are not important to the coaches, absolutely not. They are only of interest when it comes time to flirt with that line of ineligibility.” Tre stated, “I think that education is only important to coaches based on the fact that it kept student-athletes eligible to play football.” Kolby agreed with Brad, Tre, and Kendrell. He said it was discussed “when it came time to sign the scholarship, or if you were ineligible.” Kolby also stated that coaches would make remarks such as, “You need to pick your grades up or you can’t play football. You’re going to hurt our APR. You’re going to hurt our graduation rates. Hurry up and graduate because we need the scholarship for next year’s incoming class.”

Unlike the other participants, Tommy had a different experience. He felt his coaches cared. He stated:

My set of coaches, absolutely in terms of ... for what we were doing, they had to be instrumental in, because we had a guy named coach Yoxall, right? He’s a strength and conditioning coach. He took us going to classes as serious as anything we did as far as strength and conditioning on the field. That’s one of the most consistent men I knew in my life. If you mess it up for him, he’s going to mess you up. And I get that, honestly. You have to have structure. Again, when I was in school at Auburn, we had guys on the field with degrees and guys going into their fields. We got some successful guys that I played with. I’ve seen it done right, is what I’m saying.

Even though Tommy felt that his coaches cared about his academics and not just eligibility, another issue emerged that reinforced the academic smokescreen. This issue is academic clustering.

Academic clustering refers to the practice of encouraging athletes to select a designated major. However, at the heart of the issue is that student-athletes are strongly encouraged, steered, and grouped into particular majors that are considered to be easy or less challenging. A study by Newberry (2011) found that 38 out of 68 Bowl Championship Series bid schools had some level of academic clustering. As mentioned earlier, the APR standards could possibly serve as a reason for the channeling of student-athletes into certain majors. The participants talked about this phenomenon when deciding what major to select early in their collegiate career. Brad talked passionately about his athletic academic counselors' disappointment with his decision to major in finance, a major outside the normal student-athlete cluster. Brad spoke:

I had pressure from not choosing the easier route, from not choosing that AgEcon or that agriculture, that whatever kind of mess it is and whatever. I'm not going to get an agriculture degree. That's just not something I was going to do, but the academic advisors strongly pushed that, as well as, like, hotel restaurant management. I would say the more doable majors on Mizzou's campus for student-athletes, the ones that they had preexisting relationships with professors and deans and stuff like that, knowing that we would have some kind of adjustments that needed to be made, and the ones that have shown that they're capable to be worked with in that aspect. That was more the pressure that I felt, "Hey, are you sure you don't want to do this? Yeah, you'll go to finance. It's pretty hard and I'm sure you can do it. You're grades are so-so. You're not going to do as well as you think you will and it's going to be kind of hard and if you just come over here, you can do really, really well. And hotel and restaurant, don't you want to own your own place one day and don't you want to do this and that?" And they almost sell it to you in that package of you're going to be "the man." "You don't want a boss, do you? You want to work for yourself." Effectively, Missouri is an agricultural school in a sense. You can go there and get all that kind of degree and it has a great program, but the academic standards aren't really that high. So it's a good way to hide student-athletes in a major and pass them through with all the NCAA rules and regulations on completion towards graduation.

Tre talked about being pressured into a major he did not want to pursue. He commented, "I wish I would have chosen a different major but because I was so influenced by academic advisors, 'Hey, you're good at Math. You got to stay eligible,' you know, 'So let's go with the Math.'" Like Tre, Kendrell was put in a major (child and family development) that was unsatisfactory to him; however, he realized that he needed a change. He talked about why he chose the major and

why he changed it. Kendrell explained, “I think coming from where I came from, made it a lot more easier for me to fall into a submissive role and walk myself into a major that I had no interest in, and later, changed it to sports studies.” Kendrell went on to say, “I didn’t really know what it was that I wanted to do, but the reason for my change was that I knew that I felt that I could not make a living in that position.” Kolby started out pursuing a major in business, but subsequently changed it due to the rigorous demands of college sports. He said, “Business was my major. Like I said, I wanted to expand the family business of doing lawn service in the Tallahassee area, but there was a high emphasis placed on football, so my grades dipped a little bit.” The views of the other participants were the same. Eddie remarked, “I chose the major I chose because my academic counselor said, ‘This is what I think you’ll be good in: Physical Therapy.’” He went on to say, “it was set on a table for me to say Physical Therapy because of the classes that were—that you have to go in, that were a lot easier than the engineering classes, or the science classes or those types of things. It was just easier.” Tommy talked extensively about the issue with majors and what he saw while in college. He noted:

Now for most guys—don’t get me wrong—I feel like that’s one of those majors though, because of the elective room, they’re going to put most athletes in and the issue with liberal arts degrees is this: the liberal arts degree is useless unless you have a masters or a doctorate that goes along with it. You see what I mean? So, because generally the people don’t just give you a job right out the gate. “You know what, you have a bachelor’s degree in sociology. I need you.” That generally does not happen. And to me, that’s one of those degrees that’s like disciplinary studies or general studies, you know what I mean, like they’re basically keeping you eligible with a lot of electives, you do so and so, you have some rigor in the core but not a whole lot and yeah, just like communication. Like, what is a degree in communication? And I get it, some people say that’s a real degree, it’s viable but I’m talking about in a corporate setting. What is a degree in communication? We’re sitting here talking right now, that’s communication. Again, put guys in viable degree fields. Tell a guy exactly what that means. I got a degree in anthropology. But what will you do with it? How is it going to help you change the dynamics of your family? How is that going to help you if you don’t decide to go back to school in the first place to get a masters degree. Here’s exactly what you’re going to be working with. And then here’s the issue with that. They allow guys’ GPAs to be so low that grad school is a joke. You can’t get into grad school with a 2.1. How’s that going to happen? You got a

2.1 GPA out of sociology. You probably aren't going to get into grad school unless somebody hooks you up as a GA or something, coaching football. So all I'm saying is, if a guy is going to get into a major, please explain it to him what it is so he won't think that anthropology is the study of anthros, really.

It is obvious that the participants feel that academics are not the priority for major college football institutions. This theme can be problematic for current student-athletes and former student-athletes as they transition from athletes to non-playing careers.

**Issues of Race.** One major topic that repeatedly came up during the interviews with all of the research subjects was their feelings regarding issues related to race. While football is the most popular sport in America, it is heavily populated with African American players at the collegiate and professional levels. A study by Harper, Williams, and Blackman (2013) found that between 2007 and 2010, African American men were 2.8% of full-time, degree-seeking undergraduate students, but comprised 57.1% of football teams and 64.3% of basketball teams competing in major collegiate conferences such as the Atlantic Coast Conference, Big East Conference, Big Ten Conference, Big 12 Conference, Pac 12 Conference, and the Southeastern Conference. According to Lapchick (2011a), sixty-seven percent of NFL players are African American. Juxtaposed to the overrepresentation of African American athletes, research (Beamon, 2008; Donnor, 2005; Lapchick, 2011a, 2011b; National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2012) demonstrates that there is an underrepresentation of African Americans in decision-making or leadership positions. Research (Clopton, 2011; Cooper, 2012; Donnor, 2005; Harper, 2012; Kaushal and Nepomnyaschy, 2009; Singer, 2009) also points out other disparities within the sports culture that are academic, social, and economic in nature.

The participants discussed the role of race in sports openly with concern and passion. Each participant felt race played a major role in sports. All of them talked about the implications.

Tommy discussed his feelings about how student-athletes are treated at the collegiate level and the role race plays. Tommy commented:

Huge, a huge role. For revenue sports like football, the majority of those that play the sport, that produce that revenue, are black. I mean, for the most part, I feel as though it's reflective of slavery in a sense; like a lot of south heads, a lot of slaves that pick cotton, that make a bunch of money and they don't benefit from it, kind of the same sense. Now, for some they might say it's a harsh view to have on it, but I guess from what I've seen in football, that's kind of the mindset. So if I can keep an individual under-educated about it and you play a sport and make me money, the race implications on that are huge, because again, the majority of guys that play this sport for Division I football that produces revenue are black guys.

Eddie felt that African Americans did not receive the same opportunities to succeed or fail in leadership roles as other homogeneous groups. He remarked:

Race plays a huge part in sports and we still see it till this day. In the National Football League, I look at situations where one guy, a Caucasian coach, will get fired, and he could potentially or did have a losing season, and get hired immediately within a few days of him being fired. And I look at an African American coach who was fired and had a winning season and, that I know of, the African American coach still does not have a job till this day. Why does that happen?

Kolby felt the same as Eddie. He did not believe that African Americans received a fair chance to lead, diminishing the opportunity to increase quality of life. He stated, "We are not in those leading positions as many Caucasians are in. To where ... we can provide the opportunity for us to have a better quality of life." These leadership positions (on and off the field of play) were talked about at length by most of the participants. Tre also agreed. He spoke:

You have so many black males that are well qualified and that are very capable of having opportunities to work at upper level management positions that don't have those opportunities. Or if they do, you see one. Not necessarily—out of 30 people that are employed by, whether it's a company or department or whatever the case may be, you see one or two African Americans and sometimes it's not even at a senior level management position; those are the bottom tier people. So, the evidence is there to support the fact that we don't have the opportunities that other white or Caucasian males have, and so you see the discrepancy. I think it's a bad representation of what we are and what we're capable of doing.



Brad reinforced Tre's comment when he said, "the amount of black role models were few and far between." Brad also made reference to the positions on the field, describing that the different positions in football were populated according to race. He said:

Yeah, race plays a tremendous role in sports. We broke it down position by position, from cornerbacks to all white quarterbacks to all black running backs. You can't name me more than five white running backs in the league and you can't name me more than five black quarterbacks in the league. You get to coaching staffs, how many black head coaches are there?

He also talked about the stereotypes associated with certain positions. He shared:

And if you have a black quarterback, you get the stigma right off of the bat, you can run the heck out of the ball. You might be able to throw it 80 yards on one knee, but there's still going to be some kind of criticism coming out against a black quarterback. We don't know if he's going to be good or not.

The participants also described their experiences on a predominately white campus. Their experiences were similar. Their comments centered on feelings of marginalization and isolation.

Brad discussed:

Being a black student-athlete at that predominantly white campus didn't hit me until I got into the upper level of those classes. I'd say till I got accepted into the program, and now I'm in a class—your classes shrink from 400 down to 50 or 30 or 20, and then when I'm an athlete walking into a class, the next professionals, future CEOs and stuff sitting around in the desk beside me, that's when I really felt, "Hey, you don't really belong here," or it was either, "Hey, you don't really belong here or you must be one of those smart ones or somebody's got this set up for you to where you're getting all this help. You're a student-athlete so you're being entitled, so now not only do you have the advisers and tutors on campus, but you're getting help from your athletic facility too, so that's how you're doing so well in these classes." That's when I really felt almost like a spotlight. Almost like I was exposed for being a minority, being an African American in a class full of predominantly white individuals, and that's how I spent really the last part of my classes.

Brad also said that, "at Missouri my individual experience was, you're a lone ranger right now."

Tre talked about his experience in the classroom, which was similar to Brad's and the other participants. Tre said, "I was a math major, so when I got into the upper echelon of the class it was—I mean, it might have been ten people in the class and I was the only football, the only

black brother who got in there.” Kendrell talked about returning to school after he was drafted to the NFL and his professors’ expectations about obtaining a degree. He stated:

I was the only person that I think out of us that got drafted to go back to school in the end. I ended up flunking my accounting class because of the senior bowls and the combine. The professor in my accounting class said, “Aren’t you rich now? Why are you coming to class?” That’s what I was told. It burned me up.

The participants also felt that they did not have the opportunity to fully engage in college life as a general student. Eddie commented, “We were always around our football brothers, but be it black or white. So we never truly got the out-of-locker-room experience on campus.” Tre’s experience was like Eddie’s. He stated, “I really didn’t associate with the normal student body.” Kolby discussed not having a chance to participate in homecoming. He remarked, “I didn’t have the opportunity to experience the other activities that come along with homecoming as a regular student, as opposed to an athlete.” Some of the subjects defined the social experience as football players, stating that the football culture caused them to develop tribal mindsets. Tommy noted:

It causes a tribal mentality. And the whole goal for college is to network, to gain knowledge, to basically meet people so that when you get into your field, you have contacts. It causes a tribal mentality.

Kendrell summed up the experience when he said:

We had no time to take inventory of what was going on, but then a lot of times, there were the times where I was sitting in class and a lot of times, that’s where a lot happens in class, when you know a kid looking at you and he’s just looking at you because maybe you’re a good football player, but you still feel like a piece of meat or you don’t speak. You sit in there, you already feel like you’re separate from the crowd.

The participants’ responses implied that race impacted their student-athlete experience. While these issues were social in nature, the participants also felt economic issues streamed from societal racism.

**Economic Hardships.** Wealth disparity studies (Clopton, 2011; Cooper, 2012; Kaushal & Nepomnyaschy, 2009) have shown significant gaps in net worth of African American and

Caucasian families. According to Cooper (2012), in 1989 the unemployment rate of African Americans (13%) was twice that of Caucasians (5%). Additionally, the wealth gap between African Americans and Caucasians over a 23-year span (1984-2007) increased from \$20,000 to \$95,000 (Cooper, 2012). In homes where income is scarce, a host of other needs such as nutrition, education enrichment, and developmental needs are present (Kaushal & Nepomnyaschy, 2009). In this study, five of the six participants communicated growing up in low socio economic families during their childhood. Four out of the six participants grew up in single parent homes. Tommy said, “I grew up in a single parent household. My mother worked at a factory called Uniroyal. My dad was always in prison so, you know, that’s one income.” Eddie added, “So I was basically raised by my mother, who was a maid at a local hotel in Lake Charles, Louisiana. And it was one of those miracle things where, you know, mom always has something on the table.” Kendrell’s experience was similar. He remarked, “I was adopted by my grandparents—I grew up having the same situation.” Brad agreed with the others and said, “I grew up kind of similar to what’s being talked about here. My mother raised us all. I was six. I’m the oldest though. I was six when they got divorced. My dad went away and really hasn’t been in the picture since.” Tre also agreed with the rest of the participants about the income level, even though he grew up with both of his parents. He shared, “I know my mom, she worked at a chicken plant and my dad worked at a chicken plant as well growing up, so I know, for one, we were living paycheck to paycheck.” Some of the participants also talked about the living conditions of their homes and environments. Tommy explained, “Like I said, I have been to where you got stuff cut off, lights cut off and gas and all that kind of stuff and borrowing water from a neighbor and all those sorts of things.” Tre added to Tommy’s comments:

Times were bad, to say the least, when I was growing up, just because where we didn’t lack for food, we lacked for a whole lot of other stuff, you know. Lights continued to be

off, water was off, so we would go, like Tommy said, borrowing water. And even to the point where we have to boil water in my auntie's house and then bring it back so we'll get jugs of cold water, bring it over, dump it in the tub and then—so we were all basically taking baths in the same water. It was real tough.

Kendrell explained in detail the environment in his home:

A lot of my grandmother's siblings were on drugs. People don't see the part where you grew up in a neighborhood like mine. Your uncle on crack, "you better hide your clothes or I'm going to sell them," stuff like that as a child. I remember my uncle giving me beer to drink when I was eight years old. I drank four beers. My uncle gave me Budweiser, eight years old. Where I was from, it was no big deal. Grew up with my great-grandmother taking in transsexuals off the street and housing them. We grew up alongside them. Not trying to push them off to that way, but just experiencing that as a kid, so a lot of stuff doesn't surprise me when I see stuff like that. You know, as a kid seeing all that stuff you know, it was a shock, nothing like that. Growing up, my auntie snorting powder on the couch and I'm a little kid and I'm looking at the bag and the straw. It was not shocking to me, but when I look back, I'm like, "Man, this is crazy." I couldn't imagine my kids growing up like that, you know what I mean?

Eddie added:

I lived in a little small shotgun house in North Lake Charles, Louisiana, and that was kind of the way it was, me and my two brothers. And my mother was a housekeeper for a small chain hotel right near our home, and that was it. One thing I know for sure is that my mother went to work and Jamil, you probably heard these stories over and over, about where a particular guy grew up, and mine wasn't much different. There were times where we experienced hardship, more times than not, just because of the single income that was coming into the home.

While these participants' families struggled financially, the participants were proud of their parents' and others' efforts to provide with the little they had. Eddie remarked:

I promise you, yeah, we were poor but I tell you what, I never lacked for eating. Always had food on the table. Mom always did. Whether Dad was sending money home or whatever the case may be, I ate. And more importantly, and more importantly, there were times, a lot of days where my friends that I played ball with, three or four of my friends would come home to my house three or four times a week and eat the food that my mom cooked.

Kendrell said, "My mother pretty much was the backbone of the family. My grandmother—I call her mom, I was adopted—worked two jobs, cooked, cleaned, and made our beds." Brad talked about the humble meals served in his home with pride:

I mean I thought we ate great. You know, Beanie Weenie was all good with me and she did her best to get the little birthday cakes from Winn Dixie—about this big—on our birthdays and, I mean, I thought ... we didn't know any better growing up, like you said. But it was a struggle, you know.

While Tre's father is an ordained minister now, Tre shared that his father used to sell drugs to help support his family financially. Tre noted:

And I want to go on record in saying that my dad is an ordained minister now. However, when I was in high school, my dad was a drug dealer. And the fact of that is, it's funny because ... when you come into the realization of what your father is doing, it puts it in perspective wherein like I really like I hid from him, 'cause I would, at times, I had people come up to me and be like "Is your daddy going to be at home?" I'm like, "What do you mean is my daddy going to be at home? I mean it's none of your business." But, you know, this stuff started to dawn on you. At any rate, we really didn't lack for a whole lot of food, to be honest with you, 'cause pops was making it happen.

Unlike the other participants, Kolby felt like his parents did a good job of protecting him from financial strain. He stated, "At the age I was born we didn't experience many hardships. If we did, my parents did a good job of keeping that from me." He talked about his parents working multiple jobs that had him working at an early age. He mentioned:

Well, ever since ... although I said I started playing football at five years old, I was working at five years old. My dad was a true entrepreneur. He had a lawn business on the side, and he cleaned homes as well. So, at the age of five, I was also doing lawn service work, and my goal was to go to college, get a degree in business, and come back and expand the family business in lawn service.

Like the others, Kolby felt his parents provided what he and his family needed. He said, "My parents were never laid off and always had jobs. We always had food on the table and we were good."

The economic hardships of the participants did not conclude once they entered college. A study by Huma and Staurowsky (2012) that examined shortfalls of the full scholarship for basketball and football players at big-time college athletic programs, found that 82% of the student-athletes that live on campus and 90% of student-athletes that live off campus are left in

poverty by their FBS institutions. The full scholarship or full grant-in-aid covers tuition and fees, room and board, and books or course related materials. All of the participants in this study communicated not having adequate support from their full scholarships to provide the basic necessities during the college years. Kolby remarked, “On campus you received about \$230 a month. Only four scholarship checks each semester. If your parents were not helping you out it was tough.” Eddie reflected on an experience in college. He stated:

I know when I got to school, to college, I called my mom, “Hey mom, me and the fellas we’re getting ready to go out, I need 20 bucks.” She said, “Boy, are you crazy? I don’t have any money to send you to do nothing. Go sit in your room somewhere.” But never got any cash like that from moms.

Tre also added:

By the time you pay the rent and pay utility bills and stuff like that, you’re looking at \$100 a month, you know, to go out and buy groceries. So you really didn’t have adequate funds to really do any other thing, like if you wanted to go buy you a burger or something like that on a weekend, you used to have that money because you were smart and wanted to put the rest of your money towards groceries. So when you look at just some of the rules that they have in place about not allowing people to feed you and give you food, during my playing time, it was just such an awkward position because man people just want to help feed you and they’re saying no you can’t feed that person. So it was inadequate to say the least.

Brad agreed with Tre, but was happy to receive the little he received. He discussed:

When you move off campus, after you get done paying all your bills and all that kind of stuff, you have \$100 to try to do something with it. And by that time you might have a car or something so that’s gas and groceries. And then we’re not talking about going, you know, hitting the bar or the club or any kind of new gear or anything. And I said it before too, and I would send some of that money home. So I can see it from both sides. No, it wasn’t enough money, but at the same time, coming from where we’re coming from, nobody had ever given me a monthly check.

The economic struggles of the subjects’ childhoods and collegiate experiences were similar. One might assume that earning a full scholarship to a major Division I institution would alleviate economic pressures, given the lucrative environment of major college football. Unfortunately, this was not the case for the subjects in this study. The lack of provisions awarded to student-

athletes is shameful and an issue of unequal rights to many critics (Branch, 2011; Steiber, 1991; Yost, 2010; Zimbalist, 1999) of college athletics.

**Student-Athlete Rights.** For decades the argument in literature about amateur athletics and student-athlete rights has been at the forefront of college athletics. Many critics (Beamon, 2008; Branch, 2011; Cooper, 2012; Donnor, 2005; Edwards, 2000; Harper, 2012; Steiber, 1991; Yost, 2010; Zimbalist, 1999) believe that student-athletes are not treated fairly and exploited by NCAA member institutions. It has already been established in this research and other research that football student-athletes spend over forty hours a week on athletic related activities. Additionally, Huma and Staurowsky (2012) found that the majority of full scholarship athletes in football and basketball at major FBS schools are living in poverty. Not to mention, student-athletes do not benefit equally as institutions from the economic gains of their performances on and off the field. These alleged inequities has caused former UCLA basketball player, Ed O'Bannon, and other basketball and football players, to file an antitrust suit against the NCAA for profiting from athletes' names, images, and likenesses. The first-ever NCAA President, Walter Beyers, believed student-athletes were mistreated. In his memoir, he said, "The college player cannot sell his own feet (the coach does that) nor can he sell his own name (the college will do that). This is the plantation mentality resurrected and blessed by today's campus executives" (Beyers, 1995, pp. 390-391). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the term student-athlete is not what it means and was crafted for protection. Branch (2011) explains:

College players were not students at play (which might understate their athletic obligations), nor were they just athletes in college (which might imply they were professionals). That they were high-performance athletes meant they could be forgiven for not meeting the academic standards of their peers; that they were students meant they did not have to be compensated, ever, for anything more than the cost of their studies. Student-athlete became the NCAA's signature term, repeated constantly in and out of courtrooms. (pp. 23-24)

The research participants felt strongly about issues of equal rights for student-athletes. Each of them expressed them differently and talked extensively about the issues. Some even offered possible solutions. Tommy expressed his opinion with fervor. He said:

I'm objecting to slavery, and that's like my point blank, period. It's slavery. Anybody who would dispute that, they're a bald-faced liar. And what I mean, how is it that you could produce millions of dollars—excuse me—billions of dollars, billions. With a B. I'm talking about you produce NFL money and they got a collective bargaining agreement. We're the colored class, I mean, how can you produce billions of dollars and you get nothing from it? Sweat suits, a meal plan, what? That ain't money. They're throwing you a bone. "Here you go, boy. Thank you. I got to feed you some slop, go get your manners out in the field. That's where you drink your water." That's how it sounded to me. How is it that I can go out here and break my neck like the kid at Rutgers? This kid will never walk again. Rutgers is getting paper though. They are still getting money. But this kid, his life has been changed dramatically. He didn't get paid to do that. He is a student-athlete that produces revenue. What in the world? That doesn't even make sense. Again, at least back in the 1600s and 1700s they called it exactly what it was: slavery. You go out and pick your cotton and the master would make his bread. That's it. You know what I mean?

Kendrell talked about the lack of preparation to make decisions. He made comments about having flexibility in contracts in college athletics like they have in the NFL. He spoke:

I think back and I say, "Kendrell, you really are being prepared to play—well, not play, but to move to the NFL. If you had a more mature or business sense, you're going back to the business classes or whatever classes and use that information when I'm negotiating. And have somebody speak on my part, and if I know what's going on, I know what I need. I know what to ask for." You know what I mean? Just flexibility in contracts, you just don't take a contract. Now think what happens is the same thing in college when we get the letter of intent and all that stuff. You just sign; you don't read because you are so happy and everything. The parents or the child should be able to get what they want out of the deal. You know what I mean? I don't see anything wrong with that. But where do you get that from?

Eddie talked about starting a players union to increase the rights of student-athletes. He commented:

And we were talking about this earlier: a type of union to be started for the collegiate athlete. Now, I'm not just talking about African American. I'm talking about all collegiate athletes, because all collegiate athletes play a role in making money for the university. It just so happens that the majority of the athletes playing football are African American athletes. They're the ones that are a high percentage playing at these levels.



And at what point do we say, “All right. We need to start a union. We need to create something where these collegiate athletes get a stipend and get something where they can get paid to play this game”?

Brad voiced his opinion and provided information to the group of how the business of college football is growing. He discussed the arms race, how facilities are being built, and how institutions are realigning conferences to access more television revenue. He also provided his feelings about college athletes receiving pay and the conversations surrounding the issue. He remarked:

And my final point, going back to paying these athletes, hell yeah, they're exploited. Hell yeah, and that's the name of the game. But at the same time, I would love to get paid. I would love to pay the football players. But how can you look at a football player and like, “You know what? You're getting this \$2,000 extra. And you know what? That rower over there and that swimmer over there and that wrestler over there who cost money, the coach we're paying, they didn't sell enough tickets to cover one person's scholarship.” So I look at you now and say, “The same \$2,000 you're given, he or she is going to get that same \$2,000 now.” Then you get into what school is going to pay that and what can't. “Yeah, they can pay that. They got 38 sports. They can still pay that.” But you come on down to maybe UAB or somewhere like that or some of the mid majors and all that. They'll go bankrupt. So I look at you now and say, “The same \$2000 you're given, he or she is going to get that same \$2000 now.” Then you get into what school is going to pay that and what can't. “Yeah, they can pay that.” They got 38 sports. They can still pay that. But you come on down to maybe UAB or somewhere like that or some of the mid majors and all that. They'll go bankrupt. They'll go bankrupt paying 300 to 500 athletes \$2,000 a semester. It's probably going to be more than that. I'm looking at \$2,000 like we just made \$57 million this year. And I get two stacks of it. That's it?

Tre had mixed feelings about paying college athletes. He felt that money management education needed to be in place before compensating student-athletes. He stated:

However, when you look at “should a student-athlete be compensated with the current system that we have?” I say no, because there are no tools in place to teach that young man how to manage their money. And I think if you give a student-athlete right now more money in a sense of “it's extra,” then I think it creates more problems for you on campus. Should there be a system where they get paid? I think so. However, what that system is and what that looks like, I don't know; but to give a student-athlete an extra \$3,000, \$4,000 dollars at a time, I think can create havoc on campus, just because when you look at a student-athlete now, especially a football player, I mean, we're in the spotlight, just to be perfectly honest with you. And with that, I mean, you just create more spotlights. You create more opportunities for that person to get in trouble.

Kolby shared that he didn't feel that African American student-athletes benefited equally in college football as the university. He commented, "Not at all, not at all because we are ... if you look at it from a profiting standpoint, no. As far as money-wise, not at all. No, we do not receive the same benefits." Eddie also agreed and stated, "My answer is, absolutely no. I don't think that African American athletes, or any athlete per se, but we're specifically talk about African American athletes, do not get what the university is getting." When asked the same question, Brad said, "No. The answer is clearly no. Forgive me for laughing, but this—absolutely not, man." Tommy also added his "Nope." Tre also agreed: "No. That's obvious. I think a lot of institutions reap the benefits of what's actually occurring in the sport of football, particularly with African American men who make up the majority of all of our football teams of a lot of our institutions." Kendrell did not comment.

Clearly, the participants felt that they did not receive fair value at the institutions they attended for their athletic services. According to the participants' remarks, the labor and time dedicated to athletics did not yield a fair value in terms of the economic or academic return. Importantly, it prevented these student-athletes from exploring career opportunities outside of playing sports, later making transition from an athletic career to a non-playing career difficult.

**Difficult Transitions and Identity Issues.** Schlossberg et al. (1995) define transition as "any event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (as cited in Evans et al., 1998, p. 111). Transitions deal with life events that can be gains or losses (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006). According to Goodman et al. (2006):

Transitions include not only obvious life changes (such as high school graduation, job entry, marriage, the birth of one's first child, and bereavement) but also subtle changes (such as the loss of career aspirations or the non-occurrence of anticipated events, such as an expected job promotion that never comes through). Thus, an event or a non-event can be defined as a transition if it results in change. (p. 2)

For the athlete who invested an inordinate amount of time in developing his or her athletic ability, the conclusion of a career that started early in life can be a significant change.

Shahnasarian (1992) reported that over sixty percent of players who retired from the NFL since 1970 dealt with emotional and personal problems. Additionally, issues with identity (athletic and foreclosure) are germane to an athlete's transition from sport. Athletic identity is defining oneself as an athlete only. Foreclosed identity exists when individuals fail to explore other alternatives or opportunities and commit to a specific career or lifestyle (Miller & Kerr, 2003). Five out of the six research participants in this study communicated that their transitions from football to a non-playing career were difficult. Each of them talked about their personal struggles and the process of discovering who they were and what to do outside of football. Kolby talked about how it felt to when football ended:

Very tough, tough. I was actually depressed. Like I said, I have been playing the game of football since I was five years old, and simply not being around it anymore was tough. Money going out, nothing coming in, just a lot of pressure, how to handle that pressure and being patient; and the biggest challenge was, I didn't know what I was going to do next.

Tommy described his experience. He said, "It was difficult when I got done playing football because I was trying to figure out what I needed to do with my life." Tre shared his experience in depth, about his emotions, career choices, and how the transition affected him and his family. He remarked:

It was very difficult when I got released from the Baltimore Ravens, very difficult for me and my family, because you come to a point where you ask yourself this question. It's a question that keeps coming up, "Man, what am I going to do for the rest of my life? What am I going to do with myself," and you know, it was a really hard time because you went from making a lot of money to no money, and then all of a sudden you went from having a job to not having a job. You went from having some sense of security to having none at all. You had a sense of having hope to no hope. It seemed like all your dreams and aspirations changed and you know, it takes a burden on you, especially if you're married and have a family, because you have to deal with how your wife feels, how does she

adjust, how does your child adjust. So, man it was tough because, you know, I moved from Baltimore back home to Mississippi because I couldn't afford to go back to Kansas City and pay \$1,600 a month for an apartment or, at that time, for a house. So, I couldn't afford to do that so I had to move back home to Mississippi with my parents, which was a humbling experience to say the least, because you go from being in a position where you're helping your parents, month in, month out, giving them extra benefits, to you having to rely solely on your parents and other relatives to help you in this tough time. So, very humbling experience. Man, I remember my wife having to go work at McDonalds basically to make ends meet, and it was just a very difficult time, to say the least, where you're trying to recreate a different identity for yourself because you're no longer Tre Stallings the football player, you're Tre Stallings.

Like the others, Brad had a similar experience:

It was difficult for me, because it's what I had been doing for so long in my life. You're a football player. You're in this to strive to be the best football player that you can be and for whatever reason, you're not afforded the opportunity to play football anymore. That's a difficult transition in your mind to now actually accept that, "you know what, plan B is my only plan right now." And so you fight it and you drag your feet and, "Should I keep training? Should I still go? Should I try out in next year's pro day? And if I don't make it, should I try at the next pro day? Well, I don't want to be that guy, but at the same time, I don't want to give up on this dream, because I know my family could still use this money. But does this plan B, with this degree, will that make my family money while I'm here?"

Kendrell discussed his transition experience in a different manner. He had mixed feelings. On one hand, he was relieved because the pressure to perform no longer existed. On the other hand, he missed the game and felt he could play if healthy. He had early success in the NFL, but injuries brought his career to a conclusion. He explained:

Like I said before, after the first year was a relief because of the way my career had kind of happened. Starting off fast, having everything happen to me great, being an all-star first year, then getting injured twice to where I couldn't, where my left arm was paralyzed and I couldn't run my first year in Kansas City. And, that really, really was really challenging for me. It was so sudden how it happened, and like I spoke about earlier, it was morning, I would wake up in the morning crying and everything about my situation, and I felt that I asked for it, for I always asked for wisdom and knowledge. And I believe, along with the success I had early on, it gave me this false sense of who I was. I felt powerful, physically, and I had more confidence than I traditionally would have had, because I was getting that attention and I was playing in a league that was considered for men, like real men, and I was dominating it. And when that injuries—when those injuries came and now, I don't have that ability anymore, it was tough because I couldn't—when I played the game, I could not—I didn't have the explosion. I couldn't ... In some cases, I was just on the field trying to protect myself so I wouldn't get hurt more.

Kendrell also talked about finding an identity outside of sports. He said, “You’re trying to redefine yourself or find yourself because you’re probably, more than likely, like a lot of guys, you see a lot of guys who don’t know who they are.”

Unlike the others, Eddie felt his transition was easy for him. He credited his spiritual walk, family, and financial security in having longevity in the NFL and other businesses his family owned. He spoke:

And it was easy for me because of my love of Jesus Christ. I had a peace about retirement. I was totally at ease with it. My wife and I, we, at the time, we had three businesses that we owned before I was done with football. We had two growing boys. My house was intact. My relationship with my wife was intact and it still is. I shouldn’t say “was,” but at the time, it was intact. My relationship with my two boys was intact. I had no pressure whatsoever to go play more football because we were not financially unstable.

However, Eddie discussed his disdain for the league making his thirteen-year NFL career shorter. He remarked, “They said that I was too old to play, but I was better than—and I knew I could have played at a higher level than the majority of the guys that were on the team. But that’s their decision and that’s what organizations do.”

Not only did the participants talk about the transition from playing football to not playing football, but some of them also shared their experiences of transitioning to another career. They shared how the transition took time, and the process of discovering a new identity. Tommy spoke:

That transition period, though, because there’s always going to be that period, that transition period right when you get done and, for some guys, it’s going to be a few months or for some guys a few years, that they finally get comfortable in being an ex-football player getting into a new field.

Tommy also discussed his decision to return to school. Tommy shared:

I knew it would be different when I got done but once it actually happened, I was like, “Okay, I really need to figure out what I’m going to do now.” And I knew it was going to have to be, at some point, me going back to school. I didn’t want to. I remember telling my wife that I didn’t want to go back to school. She looked at me and she laughed. She

said, “Well, babe, here’s the thing. If you want to do something, you’re going to have to go back to school.”

Tre added, “My transition from football to another career was a slow process. It was slow because you’re trying to figure out basically what direction you’re going to go in.” Brad talked about feeling lost when trying to find employment outside of football. He commented:

I was lost. It was a confusing time. It almost felt like I was out in the middle of the ocean, not even choppy seas, but I was out in the middle of the ocean with this boat made out of my diploma, but I had no direction and all I had was my hands to paddle. So I’m leaning over to the side of the boat just paddling somewhere hoping that I end up at somebody’s island of employment.

Kendrell talked about the struggle of figuring out what to do next in life:

I guess—the biggest thing was trying to find, “Who are you?” You have money. You may or may not—tendency—should I pursue a career in sports, either be coaching, conditioning, commentating and everything, when in fact, you may find out that you didn’t really have a strong love for the sport, that you just played because of the benefits, or you enjoyed it. Or you enjoyed it enough to just ride it out and then you find out that that isn’t really what you want to do.

Kolby expressed that finding another career was a grind. He shared, “trying to find a job is a fulltime job.” For Eddie, his process was different because of longevity (13-year career) in the league and his other business options to pursue. He discussed his feelings when he was told his services were no longer needed. He said:

You get to a certain point, they say, “We’re done.” And I was totally fine with it. And when I left the game, at peace, I’m still at peace to this day. I still love the game of football and we’re living pretty good.

Each of the participants expressed their love for football. This love for the game had both positive and negative consequences. Positively, the game opened the door for each of them to live out their childhood dream. Negatively, the focus and attention on football caused them to struggle with their personal and professional identity. Thankfully, each of them has worked through these difficult transitions.

## **Summary of Findings**

The central research question in this study was, “What are the experiences and perceptions of African American male football student-athletes at Division I institutions who played professional football concerning their collegiate experience and the transition from athletics to non-playing careers?” As discussed throughout this chapter, the research participants talked about the importance of football, how it was a way to achieve upward mobility, and how they began playing the sport at an early age. They also discussed how academics were not important to some stakeholders (coaches, counselors, administrators, etc.) in athletics departments and on campus. Furthermore, the time they were required to spend on football related activities and the process of choosing a major was shared. The research participants also shared their feelings about racial issues in sports and how these issues manifested on and off the field, leaving them feeling isolated from others and treated unequally. They dialogued about their childhoods and growing up in low socio economic environments in their hometowns, as well as the lack of financial support received from institutions as college football student-athletes. Additionally, the subjects expressed their feelings about the lack of student-athlete rights and offered suggestions to improve the conditions of college student-athletes. Lastly, they discussed their difficulties with transitioning from the game of football to a non-playing career.

Based on this summary, it is evident that structural, systemic, and cultural problems exist within major college football. The participants’ shared experiences provide a unique perspective and opportunity for stakeholders to include the student-athletes’ voices in the decision-making process for reform. The next chapter will discuss these concerns and implications in more depth.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand and explore perceptions of African American male football athletes at Division I institutions that also played professional football, regarding their collegiate experiences and transition from athletics to post-playing careers. This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section will apply the theoretical frameworks to analyze the data. The second section will use the data to answer the research questions presented in the study and discuss the sensitizing concepts and key issues. The third will discuss the strengths and limitations of the study. Lastly, the final section will conclude with implications for stakeholders.

#### **Theoretical Analysis**

This section provides a brief summary of the theoretical frameworks used in the study. Furthermore, the connections made with the major areas of focus in each theory and the findings are analyzed and explained.

**Critical Race Theory.** Critical Race Theory (CRT) recognizes continuing political and economic inequalities based on race. CRT challenges status quo ideologies of different forms of racism in America that manifest themselves through people and social institutions (Bell, 1992; Donnor, 2005; Milner, 2007). The three major tenets of CRT are as follows: 1) Racism is prevalent and an ordinary part of American society; 2) A society creates and develops its own



self-interest using narratives to deflect negativity from unfair treatments of others; 3) CRT holds that white elites will tolerate and reassure racial progress only if it succors their self-interest (Bell, 1992; Harrison & Lawrence, 2003; Landson-Billings, 1998; Singer, 2005; Tate, 1997; Wing, 1997).

The use of CRT in the analysis of this research provided an important lens through which to view race. Issues of race emerged as a major theme as all of the research participants expressed that race played a major role in his experience of collegiate sports. On several occasions, the participants referred to the overrepresentation of African Americans in the sport of football and the lack of opportunities afforded African Americans to receive equal opportunity to succeed in leadership roles off the field. Research by Lapchick (2011a, 2011b) and the National Collegiate Athletic Association (2010) support this claim and highlight the disparity of opportunities between African Americans and Caucasians in administrative roles. Additionally, the participants felt race was an issue on the field. Respondents repeatedly remarked about how positions occupied by athletes on the field were determined by race. The subjects also discussed the stereotypes associated with being an African American student-athlete at a predominately white institution. Most reported feelings of isolation in the classroom. According to the participant responses, forms of isolation (segregation from the student body) were perpetuated by the football culture and its time demands, which did not include the full experience of being a college student. These experiences shared by the participants indicate that racism is perceived as prevalent and ordinary at academic institutions with major college football programs. This finding is consistent with CRT's first tenet.

Further, the manner in which players were portrayed by sports media surfaced. The participants talked about the distinctions made between African American and Caucasian

quarterbacks and how African American quarterbacks were stereotyped as runners and athletes, and Caucasians as pocket passers and more cerebral. Lapchick's (2013) report regarding race and gender in sports media, published by the Associated Press, supports this notion made by the participants and the tenets of CRT. Lapchick (2013) reported that "in 2012, 90.9 percent of the sports editors, 86.6 percent of the assistant sports editors, 83.9 percent of our columnists, 86.3 percent of our reporters and 86 percent of our copy editors/designers were white" (p. 1-2). It is logical to assume the stories told in the media about African American athletes, coaches, and administrators are presented from a Caucasian perspective. This data both explains the comments of the participants and supports the second tenet of CRT, which asserts that dominant groups in society create narratives that deflect and justify unjust treatment of members of minority groups.

Finally, the agreement between university athletic programs and student-athletes is one where the university receives athletic talent with entertainment value in exchange for an athlete receiving an education. In some instances phrases like "free ride" are used to define the nature of the scholarship a student-athlete receives. In contrast, the narrative data from this research suggest that what the student-athlete receives may not be a free education. The scholarship earned by the student-athlete is one-year renewable, meaning that the coach or athletic department is only responsible to aid a student-athlete one year at a time, with the institution having the option to renew or not. The subjects remarked negatively about this bait and switch practice of promising the opportunity to earn a degree by coaches, followed with the practice of coaches non-renewing implied multi-year scholarship offers/contracts. Issues of this nature have been raised by many critics (Beamon, 2008; Beyers, 1995; Branch, 2011; Cooper, 2012; Donnor, 2005; Edwards, 2000; Harper, 2012; Steiber, 1991; Yost, 2010; Zimbalist, 1999). Assertions of exploitation are raised when student-athletes do not participate in decision-making processes that

influence their lives while institutions financially benefit from their labor. All of the participants felt they were used and exploited by their respective institutions. Major findings by Huma and Staurowsky (2012) highlight disparities similar to the ones articulated by the participants. The respondents in this research discussed the failure of scholarships to provide what athletes need to take advantage of a full education complete with a diploma. Inequities were noted between what scholarships provide and the level of compensation coaches receive, and living allowances that keep athletes living below U.S. federal poverty guidelines. Respondents also highlighted the disparity between the level of scholarship and support provided and the fair market value of the athletic services provided by college athletes. Huma and Staurowsky (2012) found that full scholarship student-athletes at the FBS level had out-of-pocket expenses over \$3,000, that 82% of players living on campus and 90% of players living off campus were living in poverty, and that, given a fair market over a four-year career, the lost value of the average football and basketball player is \$456,612 and \$1,063,307, respectively.

Further academic issues are raised by the term “student-athlete,” which is widely used by institutions and the media. The term implies that academics are placed before sports. This was far from the experience of the participants. Each respondent felt sports were the priority and that academics were only important to some university officials to keep players eligible to play. Sadly, according to the participants, the emphasis placed on eligibility contributed to the practice of clustering athletes into majors considered to have easier curriculums, or that accommodated workout and practice times. Each of the participants said he was encouraged to, and did, spend the majority of his time on football related activities.

Clearly, racial issues are highlighted when the majority of the major college football programs’ student-athletes are African American and are not graduating at a similar rate as their

Caucasian teammates, even though both are paying for a quality education through the entertainment value of their athletic ability. Many researchers (Beamon; 2008; Donnor, 2005; Harper, 2012; Harper et al., 2013; Harrison & Lawrence, 2003) note that some student-athletes are academically unprepared for college, and a gap exists in the graduation rates of African American student-athletes compared to Caucasian student-athletes. Participants articulated awareness that the revenue generating sports of football and basketball, overly-populated by African Americans, underwrite men's and women's non-revenue sports (tennis, golf, volleyball, crew, soccer, etc.) that mostly comprise middle and upper class Caucasian athletes (Donnor, 2005). The inequities experienced by the participants, displayed through economics, academics, and methods of control used by members of the dominant culture, reinforce CRT's third tenet. Because of the benefits African American athletes provide predominately white institutions, African Americans receive athletic scholarships, but the demands of college athletics prevent integration with the broader culture of the student body and the academic community.

Overall, utilizing CRT in this study provided depth, understanding, and meaning to racial issues in sports. This awareness may help sports professionals and institutions see and acknowledge the systemic and cultural characteristics that negatively impact African American student-athletes. The voices of the participants in this study provide an inside perspective of college football that reveals perceptions of deeply embedded issues of race within the culture of college football. Given that football represents a relatively small portion of the lives of athletes, issues of career transition of football players provides a second theoretical lens used to analyze the narrative data.

**Transition Theory.** Schlossberg et al. (1995) define transition as “any event, or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles” (as cited in Evans et

al., 1998, p. 111). Transitions are said to require “new patterns of behavior” and are life events that involve gains and losses (Goodman et al., 2006, p. 33). Examples of transitional life events are marriage, divorce, birth of children, job loss, graduation, death of loved ones, or not receiving a promotion on a job when expecting one. These events and non-events are considered transitions because they result in change. These changes also have meaning. Scholars (Evans et al., 1998; Goodman et al., 2006; Komives & Woodard, 2003) classify the meanings into three types: Type, Context, and Impact. The Type of event that occurs can be anticipated or unanticipated. The Context in which the event happens defines the relationship of the individual to the event. The significance of the event in an individual’s life is referred to as the Impact. As mentioned earlier, the transition process occurs over a period of time. Individuals must move in, through, and out of events and non-events. Important to Transition Theory are factors that influence transitions. These factors are coping mechanisms and are referred to as the 4 Ss: situation (what is happening), self (who it is happening to), support (what help is available), and strategies (how does the person cope) (Goodman et al., 2006). These factors are viewed as either assets or liabilities during the process of change.

In this study, Transition Theory was appropriate for analyzing the participants’ narratives. The theory helped to identify the changes in the relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles of these African American football players. For all of the participants, the major change event discussed was the end of their football careers. The end of each career meant something different for each participant. As it relates to Transition Theory, the Type of transition (Goodman et al., 2006) for the participants referred to how each individual left the game. Each of the subjects’ careers ended through termination, retirement, or injury. The Context in which the participants’ careers ended were similar. At some point, during the evaluation process, personnel

executives of the NFL clubs felt that participants could no longer benefit the franchises athletically. Not to mention, Context was also defined through the participants' explanations of their feelings. Some of the participants described the experience as humbling. It was viewed this way because the participants communicated their status: changing from employed to unemployed and from provider to needing assistance. Further, the Impact of the transition signified the extent to which the transition altered all of the subjects' lives. The Impact of the transition from football, for most participants, was financial, social, emotional, relational, marital, psychological, familial, and occupational.

Lastly, the participants talked about ways in which they coped with the transitions. As stated earlier, the situations of each of the participants were unique. Two of the participants were more financially stable than the other four, due to being higher draft picks and playing longer in the NFL. Two participants returned to school to complete advanced degrees while two others completed professional internships. Most of the participants' view of self was similar during the initial transition. All but one felt that not playing football was difficult and discouraging. However, through support from friends and family, all of the participants found their way out of football to a newfound identity. Having a spiritual life — expressed by the subjects as Christian beliefs — emerged as a significant coping mechanism to help deal with the effects of the transition out of football. According to Goodman et al. (2006), studies have demonstrated that individuals with an optimistic spiritual identity “cope more efficiently with stress, heal faster, and establish healthier lifestyles” (p. 74).

Transition Theory applied to this study helped to give meaning to the experiences of these African American student-athletes. The theory offered a framework to describe the process of change for athletes transitioning from an athlete to non-athlete role. Moreover, the theory

provided informative coping strategies (4 Ss) with explanatory power to understand the unique situation faced by each individual experiencing the transition. The theory's broad and unassuming approach of not classifying groups or individuals based on age and other restrictions was helpful in understanding the changes the research participants experienced. Transition Theory and Critical Race Theory were not only useful in providing a framework to understand these issues, but also in answering the research questions.

### **Research Questions**

This research examined the perceptions and views of African American male football student-athletes' collegiate experience and career transitions after sports. Using focus group and individual interviews, data was collected from six African American male football student-athletes at Division I institutions who played professional football. The data was analyzed using Critical Race Theory and Transition Theory around the research sub-questions that included sensitizing concepts from Cooper's (2012) study. Cooper used sociological imagination as a framework to examine the experiences of black athletes at predominately white institutions and found four major themes: Racial Discrimination/Social Isolation, Academic Neglect, Economic Deprivation, and Limited Leadership Opportunities. This research adds to Cooper's (2012) study through the stories and lived experiences of African American football athletes who completed careers as collegiate and professional football players and transitioned from sports to non-athlete careers.

The first sub-question asks about the student-athletes' perceptions and experience regarding race and social interaction. Cooper (2012) defined this issue as one where African Americans student-athletes encounter milieus and social standards that are fashioned by and for the dominant Caucasian culture. The participants' experiences supported Cooper's (2012)

findings. Each of the participants felt that race played a major role in sports. The messages from the subjects were uniform across the board. All of the participants had experienced or witnessed inequality both on and off the field. The experiences shared by the research subjects centered on how they were viewed as African American athletes, the lack of opportunities afforded to minorities to succeed, and feelings of isolation. The subjects also pointed out inconsistencies in job opportunities afforded minorities. All of the participants felt that their homogeneous group did not receive the same opportunities to lead and have success in positions of authority within college athletics. They referenced hiring practices of college and professional sports and the lack of diversity and inclusion within the organizations. Lastly, the participants dialogued about feeling isolated in the classroom. Many of them discussed their feelings of being lonely and the only African American in the classroom. Issues were also expressed regarding how faculty and other students perceived and treated them. They also talked about the football culture and time demands that did not allow time to fully engage into campus life. Some participants felt this created a tribal mindset within the football team.

The second sub-question focuses on academic preparation. Cooper's (2012) study found that academics were often neglected for African Americans athletes. In agreement with the literature (Cooper, 2012; Harrison & Lawrence, 2004; Newberry, 2011; Sharp & Sheilley, 2008) regarding academic preparation/neglect, the research participants felt that academics were not important to some officials in athletic programs. The participants talked about how academics seemed only an eligibility concern for some members of the athletic departments. Additionally, all of the subjects recalled that most of their time was spent and dedicated to football related activities. As stated earlier, the time dedicated to football limited the time available to explore other educational opportunities outside of sport, creating a form of isolation. Moreover, each of



the participants expressed issues with how athletes choose a major field of study. Each discussed the lack of support received from academic counselors when they articulated a desire to pursue other career interests outside of the normal academic track for student-athletes. Thus, in regards to question two, the findings from this research are consistent with the previous research (Cooper, 2012; Harrison & Lawrence, 2004; Newberry, 2011; Sharp & Sheilley, 2008).

The third sub-question inquires about the research participants' experiences and perceptions related to economic status. Cooper (2012) felt that disparities were developed for blacks through practices of exploitation, unequal distribution of wealth, and stratification of power. Research (Clopton, 2011; Cooper, 2012; Kaushal & Nepomyaschy, 2009) studies have highlighted significant gaps in wealth, annual income, unemployment rates, and the stratification of power between African Americans and Caucasians in American society. Five of the six research participants communicated that they grew up in low socio economic environments. Four of the six participants also said that they were raised by single parents. Furthermore, the jobs held by the participants' parents were described as subservient roles. The subjects communicated that their parents held multiple jobs in factories and plants, and worked as custodians. Significantly, the economic hardships of the participants did not cease once they arrived at their respective college campuses. All of the participants described not having enough money to fully support basic needs. Additionally, some of the participants described sending money to their families to help support financial needs at home. Furthermore, other participants remarked that their parents could not supplement the athletic aid they received. The Research by Huma and Staurowsky (2012) substantiate the participants' experiences. Huma and Staurowsky (2012) examined the shortfalls of the full scholarship for basketball and football players at big-time college athletic programs and found that 82% of the student-athletes that live on campus and

90% of student-athletes that live off campus are left in poverty by their Football Subdivision institutions.

In addition to these struggles, the participants also felt they were exploited and did not benefit equally in college football as did the universities. They shared their perspectives and described these experiences as being like slavery. Certainly, college athletes are not slaves. There are not shackles on college campuses and college football players are free to leave any time they choose. This said, it is meaningful that many of the participants used the strong language of slavery, or concurred with other athletes when the term was brought up. The extremely emotionally charged language used indicates powerful feeling about issues of race and exploitation in college football. From the perspective of players, they are being taken advantage of to make others a profit in a system that they have no choice but to participate in if they aspire to play professional football. Participants described a system that makes billions of dollars while providing them with little voice, control, or economic reward. From this perspective, the strong language articulated by the participants raises serious concerns about prevalent feelings of oppression within college football.

Along the same lines, all of the participants felt that student-athletes should be paid. Many critics (Beamon, 2008; Branch, 2011; Donnor, 2005; Edwards, 2000; Harper, 2012; Steiber, 1991; Yost, 2010; Zimbalist, 1999) have argued in their research that student-athletes are not treated fairly and are exploited by NCAA member institutions. The findings in this study agree with existing research (Cooper, 2012; Harrison & Lawrence, 2004; Newberry, 2011; Sharp & Sheilley, 2008).

The fourth and final sub-question asked the participants to discuss their experiences and perceptions related to leadership opportunities. Cooper's (2012) research found that blacks were

underrepresented in leadership positions in society due to racist beliefs that their intellect was inferior to whites. Studies (Harper et al., 2012; Lapchick 2010, 2011a, 2011b, 2013; National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2010) have demonstrated the underrepresentation of African Americans in leadership roles in sports. Also, research by Harper, et al. (2013) and Lapchick (2011a) have shown the overrepresentation of African American athletes in collegiate and professional sports respectively. Arguably, these racial imbalances indicate that African Americans are accepted in roles as athletes (laborers), but not in roles of leadership. To the extent that these inequities are true, exploitation exists. The results from the participants' responses supported the literature. The participants all communicated that they did not feel that African Americans in sports received a fair chance to lead. They remarked about the longevity, or lack thereof, for African Americans in occupying head coaching positions. Further, the subjects talked about the dearth of African Americans in upper-level college administrators and professional sports front office personnel. Many of the participants stated that they only could remember one or two African Americans that were not coaches working at their respective institutions. Additionally, the participants commented that African American role models on their college campuses were scarce. The subjects also discussed stereotypes and their effects on the roles athletes play on the field. The quarterback position was referenced. Most of the participants agreed that differences were seen between African Americans and Caucasians in this position. The participants felt African American players were viewed as athletes and Caucasians were seen as smart and better decision makers.

Other key issues that emerged from the interviews were the importance of football student-athlete rights, difficult transitions, and identity issues. The participants expressed their love, motivation, and gratitude for the game. All of the participants believed that they would not

be who they were without football. Moreover, they referenced the relationships and opportunities that football gave them. The subjects also felt that student-athletes should be given more benefits as key contributors to the financial prosperity of athletic departments. They commented that the time dedicated to football took away the opportunity to have a full collegiate experience and discover what path they wanted to pursue occupationally. Further, they talked about the formation of a players union, paying athletes, and other possible solutions to help support student-athlete self-interest. Correspondingly, the participants dialogued about their process of transition from athlete to non-athlete. Each of the participants, except one, said the transition from football was difficult. The difficult transitions of the participants were described as depressing and discouraging. The subjects talked about how the transitions affected their identity, family, finances, and emotions. Five of the participants, who had tough times dealing with the end of playing football, stated that they questioned what to do with the rest of their life.

In summary, race played a major role in the lives of the participants, negatively affecting their social interactions within and outside the football culture. Additionally, the academic experience for each participant was sub-par, not encouraging intellectual and occupational development outside of a sports playing career. Economically, the financial conditions of the participants in college were reflective of their home environments. These poor financial circumstances left the participants feeling exploited by the college football industry, which excluded them from the positive economic returns they produced. Lastly, opportunities to lead were meager for the participants and members of their homogeneous group due to negative stereotypes as the result of racism. These responses of the research participants provide an illustration of the collegiate experiences of former African American male football players at Division I institutions.

## **Strengths and Limitations**

This research study examining the career transition of African American male football players at Division I institutions had a number of strengths. First, the participant sample fielded former student-athletes who played professional football. This helped to provide credible information and offer thick, rich narratives. Second, each of the participants attended different Division I institutions and were born and raised in different states, but had similar experiences, reinforcing universality of the study results. Third, all of the participants agreed to disclose their names. The disclosure of the subjects' identities added value to the study in that it authenticated the data. Fourth, my role as the principal researcher and instrument was significant and strengthened this study. My background as a former Division I student-athlete and current athletics administrator at various levels (i.e. conference, NFL, and BCS Division I institution) of sport made the participants feel comfortable with sharing their experiences and perceptions. Fifth, utilizing pre-interview, focus group, and individual interview techniques helped to achieve triangulation. Further, it gave the research participants a better understanding of the study and allowed them to be more thorough in their responses.

While this study had several strengths, there were also some limitations. One limitation was the number of participants in this study. More participants would have produced more data. Additionally, with the small sample, the voices of other student-athletes may not have been represented. Even though my role as the principal researcher is a strength, it also a limitation. As I stated earlier, I had to be aware of my biases and facilitate the interviews without choosing sides. Another limitation was the specified geographic region where the participants were selected. Examining other student-athletes at institutions outside the specified region might have produced different results. The final limitation was the lack of diversity in the sample. Only

studying African American football players that played professional football excluded the views of other ethnic groups and college student-athletes that might have had similar or different experiences.

## **Implications**

The results from this study have many practical implications for stakeholders associated with higher education and student-athlete well-being. Recommendations are provided for these stakeholders to help improve conditions for the sports industry. It is paramount that parents, student-athletes, football coaches, athletic administrators and campus leadership, and athletics associations and conferences, increase transparency and accountability about the issues presented in this study to ultimately affect organizational change patterns in sports.

**Parents.** As one of the research participants (Eddie Kennison) stated, “The mindset starts at home.” It is imperative for parents to learn about the history and realities of sports and higher education. Increasing knowledge about institutions and their educational and social capital can be beneficial for their son’s present and future decision-making processes. Additionally, parents should seek to understand the realities of a professional football career. This could help to manage the expectations of the family as well as the prospective student-athlete prior to his matriculation through college and professional sports. Furthermore, parents should seek counsel or mentorship from other families who have experienced the recruiting process and entry into the NFL. Having a clear understanding of these processes would allow parents to be proactive and avoid negative situations as well as recognize and take advantage of the positive opportunities. Lastly, the parents should support their child. Simply stated, be involved. If the father/mother of the child is not present, look for a mentor or male/female role model to fill the void. Furthermore, be engaged in the academic and social affairs of the child. Help them understand

the true value of education and preparation for the future. Allowing student-athletes to pass classes unprepared, academically, will have negative consequences, hindering future achievement outside of football. Parental involvement will help the student-athlete face and work through unique challenges.

**Student-Athletes.** For the student-athlete, the word “responsibility” is uniquely important. While the social, academic, and economic backgrounds can issue challenges to a student-athlete pursuing higher education and a sports career, taking responsibility for one’s own actions and behavior is essential. In this context, responsibility means that football student-athletes at every level (high school, college, and pro) need to increase their knowledge about institutions of higher learning, their fundamental rights as students, available resources, statistics about pro sports careers, and the professional football evaluation process. Having more understanding of these areas will aid them in their decision making process. Knowing specifics (i.e., cost of tuition, academic programs, prestige, job placement statistics, treatment of minorities) about colleges can help the student-athlete maximize their future opportunities as students. Understanding their rights and benefits as students and developing a players union will help them hold institutions and athletic departments accountable in providing them appropriate resources and services. Seeking out, utilizing, and maximizing the resources afforded to them will help them in reaching their goals both on and off the field. Fully understanding that 98% of college football players do not make it to the NFL, and that NFL playing careers are short-lived, can assist the student-athlete in becoming more exploratory of occupational pursuits outside of sports (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2011; Shahnasarian, 1992). Lastly, knowing that the NFL and its club members spend millions of dollars on evaluating talent will help the student understand that great talent will be found. In essence, if the student-athlete is a good

enough football player, no matter where they choose to attend college, the league will find them. This type of understanding will help the student-athlete evaluate and chooses universities with academic prestige as well as athletic prestige. Knowledge in these areas will help the student-athlete make better and more informed decisions.

**Football Coaches.** Football coaches at the Division I BCS level must acknowledge the influence and power they possess. While the stakes are high to win football games, coaches must not develop a win at all cost ethos. The win at all cost ethos is detrimental to the sport of football because it diverts the attention from player and coach relationships to focus on performance and profit. Coaches must be truthful with prospective student-athletes about their expectations and the agreement between the university and the student-athlete, discussing both the positive and negative consequences. Academically, more emphasis should be placed on discovering areas of interest for the student-athlete outside of the football facility. Too much time is devoted to football related activities for these student-athletes, especially when the coach knows the chance of a college football student-athlete making it to the NFL is meager. Further, the coach should use his influence to impact the lives of football student-athletes. The student-athlete values what coaches say and that influence should not be abused, creating dissension between the university and former student-athletes. Lastly, coaches must always be honest with their players in athletic performance and behavior evaluations. While the student-athlete or player may not agree or like what is being said, it is imperative that the coach speaks truthfully and the athlete knows where he stands.

**Athletic Administrators and Campus Leadership.** Athletic administrators and practitioners have a great opportunity to influence the athletic culture as well as the student-athlete experience. Administrators must clearly define the ethical and moral standards of their



programs and departments to ensure the academic and social success of these student-athletes that attend the academy. This success is not always achieved by giving rewards, but can also be gained through negative consequences. Tacitly approving negative behaviors to keep student-athletes available for Saturday's game can lead to negative outcomes, compromising their ability to assimilate into the real world where negative consequences exist. Further, administrators need to engage the student-athletes more. Employing some type of mentoring program, where administrators are paired with student-athletes, will help both the administrators and student-athletes develop affinity beyond athletics. Further, these administrators will become another form of support to these student-athletes. Along those lines, athletic departments need to make an effort to address diversity issues in their hiring practices for decision-making and coaching positions. This would broaden the perspectives of athletic departments, which would increase the communication between African American student-athletes and the administration.

Collegiate administrations must continue to find ways to appreciate the academic staff's contributions to the success of the athletic programs. Instead of incentivizing coaches for Academic Progress Rates (APR), academic staffs, working directly with the student-athletes daily, should receive these rewards. Lastly, the power given to football coaches needs to be tempered by the university presidents/chancellors and athletic directors. The importance of football is so great that coaches are the highest paid people on most college campuses and revered by media, alumni, fans, and members of athletic staffs. This celebrity status can be problematic at times, creating pressure for the football coach and his staff to win or be terminated. Cultures like this, where the majority of the time is used to reinforce the athletic role, takes away the student-athlete's opportunity to engage in other activities outside of sports, contributing to athlete role identity. Additionally, these pressures become a catalyst for

educational malpractice such as academic clustering. More emphasis, time, and resources should be dedicated to areas of life skill development and internship programs, as well as campus involvement. Providing these opportunities for student-athletes will help them have a full collegiate experience and understand the big picture which, in turn, will produce a better football player on the field.

Further, campus leadership and athletics departments must collaborate with one another to develop strategies and plans to help give the student-athletes a meaningful collegiate experience. Both parties play integral roles in providing a balanced environment for the entire student body. However, university presidents are key to ensuring an environment where student-athletes are students first and athletes second. The presidents must be firm with athletics departments about their commitment to education and the priorities of the universities. Presidents must also help academics understand athletics obligations. In essence, the presidents must establish a balanced culture. Conducting symposiums and open forums between athletics and the academic units of the university, to educate one another about their responsibilities, could open up the understanding of the university community and create a more productive work environment. Including athletics personnel on university committees, as well as designating spaces for student-athletes in the associated student body decision making process, could increase communication and deconstruct negative stereotypes that either respective group might have about the other.

**Athletic Associations and Conferences.** The governing structures of sports member institutions play an enormous role in the experiences of the football student-athlete. Associations such as the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), along with conferences and leagues, help to establish the rules and regulations to police sport and protect the interest of the

student-athlete. However, for years the governing structures have received scrutiny for their rules and unfair treatment of the student-athletes. The area of most concern that needs to be addressed is amateurism, which hinders student-athletes from receiving compensation. According to the literature (Beamon, 2008; Branch, 2010; Huma & Staurowsky, 2012; Stieber, 1991; Zimbalist, 1999), college student-athletes are major contributors to the revenue generating sports, but do not come close to receiving the wealth that they produce. The NCAA and its members must allow institutions to fully fund scholarships to cover the cost of attendance for the revenue generating athletes. This will help student-athletes provide the basic necessities for living during their matriculation at college institutions. Additionally, the NCAA and others must allow student-athletes to profit from the free market or develop a revenue sharing plan. While the earned education is considered to be the return for athletic prowess for student-athletes, the values are unequal. The revenues received from the free market or revenue sharing plan could be utilized to fund educational and other pursuits of the student-athlete's choice.

Another rule that should be altered is the Academic Progress Rate (APR). The APR was created to help student-athletes, but is limited in that it does not provide athletes the same flexibility as non-student-athletes to explore different majors. In addition to the APR, a rule should be established that mandates the completion of two internships before exiting school. This would help the student-athlete gain valuable work experience and develop job marketable skills. Also, this would provide opportunities for student-athletes to explore non-playing careers. Moreover, associations and conferences should develop uniform disciplinary processes. Having uniform policies could reduce negative behavioral issues of student-athletes and level the playing field for all institutions in sports. In addition to the disciplinary policies, conferences should sponsor leadership development symposiums and summits to train student-athlete leaders. These

leadership and career development seminars could aid the student-athletes in their professional growth and help them transition successfully to non-playing careers. Lastly, it is recommended that the NCAA and conferences develop a better student-athlete organization to have a significant voice in the decision-making process of the governing body. Too often, the student-athlete's voice is excluded and not heard, leading to the creation of rules and regulations that do not favor them. Including the student-athlete in these major decisions would broaden the perspective of stakeholders and produce favorable outcomes for all parties involved.

### **Future Research**

Future research on African American male Division I football players might examine student-athletes that did not play professional football and explore their experiences and perceptions about their collegiate experience and career transition to non-playing careers. Additionally, researching other Division I major college football institutions' athletes located in different geographic regions would help to identify similarities and differences of the student-athlete experience. Further, studying job placement success numbers of student-athletes who graduated would offer relevant insight to college athletics preparation of athletes and the social capital of these institutions. Likewise, examining student-athletes who did not earn degrees would provide helpful information to athletic administrators and academic counselors.

Examining other ethnicities, gender, and their experiences might shed light on differences or similarities. Researching the same issues in this study with former African American athletes in the coaching and athletic administrative leadership roles at major football schools could also reveal truths about race and its effects on society. Additionally, researching African Americans in mid-level management positions could also amplify knowledge regarding race in sports. Lastly, this research should be extended further beyond this research analysis. Studying

institutions outside the major BCS conferences and in smaller divisions of the NCAA is warranted.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this research study presented important findings related to the experiences and perceptions of African American male football student-athletes at Division I institutions that played professional football concerning their collegiate experience and their transitions from athletics to non-playing careers. This research has improved our understanding of the African American football student-athlete's experience in higher education and in professional sports. While there is a large volume of research documenting the concerns examined through the research questions, little research has presented the experiences and perceptions of African American athletes.

The narratives of the research subjects are consistent with existing research. This research adds to our understanding of issues of race and college athletics by providing a new level of depth through the stories and perceptions of the research participants. Taken as a whole, the narrative data indicates a strong, pervasive, independent, and unique culture within college football, a culture which has profound meaning and impact on the lives of the young men who participate. Participants express this culture in both positive and negative terms. This research provides an inside articulation of the norms, values, and beliefs that dominate the culture of college football. Based on the narrative data, it appears ongoing problems with exploitation and the under-education of college athletes are endemic within the systemic policies and rules and the institutional cultures and sub-cultures of college football. Ultimately, to address issues of race and exploitation within college athletes, unfair policies and rules that benefit institutions at the expense of African American athletes, and cultural norms and practices within college

athletics that perpetuate racial discrimination and social isolation, academic neglect, economic hardship, and lack of leadership opportunities, must change.

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## LIST OF APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A: STUDY INVITATION

April 4, 2013

Jamil Northcutt  
The University of Mississippi  
910 Augusta Drive, #504  
Oxford, MS 38655  
[jamiln@olemiss.edu](mailto:jamiln@olemiss.edu)

Dear John,

Thank you for your interest in my research study. As you probably know, I am a graduate student at the University of Mississippi working towards a doctorate in Higher Education. Your participation will help me successfully complete the obligations for my dissertation.

This study will consist of a pre interview, focus group interview, and an individual interview. The interviews will not last longer than two hours. You will be asked several questions about your perceptions and beliefs regarding your collegiate experience and career transition after sports. You are encouraged to candidly share your thoughts and feelings to each question. After completion of the interviews, additional follow up questions may be needed. Please know that every step will be taken to ensure anonymity unless written consent is granted by you, the participant, to disclose your identity.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw consent or terminate your involvement at any time. If you have any additional questions, please feel free to contact me through correspondence at the listed address above, by electronic mail at [jamiln@olemiss.edu](mailto:jamiln@olemiss.edu), or by phone at either (662) 915-1745 (work) or (662) 832-8008 (cell). Your correspondence with me will serve as consent for this study.

Thank you again for your willingness to participate in this study.

Sincerely,

Jamil Northcutt  
Doctoral Candidate  
The University of Mississippi

**This study has been reviewed by The University of Mississippi's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has determined that this study fulfills the human research subject protections obligations required by state and federal law and University policies. If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a participant of research, please contact the IRB at (662) 915-7482**

## APPENDIX B: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

## **Consent to Participate in a Qualitative Study**

**Title:** The Dilemma: Career Transition of African American Male Football Players at Division I Institutions

**Investigator**

Jamil Northcutt  
The University of Mississippi  
910 Augusta Drive, #504  
Oxford, MS 38655  
(662) 832-8008

**Sponsor**

Timothy Letzring, Ph.D., J.D.  
Leadership and Counselor Education  
117 Guyton Hall  
University, MS 38677  
(662) 915-7069

**Description:**

You are invited to participate in a research study on the career transition of African American male athletes. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to understand and explore perceptions of African American male football athletes at Division I institutions who also played professional football, regarding their collegiate experiences and transition from athletics to post-playing careers.

Topics to be examined include issues of race and social isolation, and the transition from collegiate to professional sports. Subjects will be asked to reflect on the choice of academic major, progress and performance in the classroom, the time demands of sports, living on campus with an athletic identity, and the collegiate experience and post athletic career transition. This research will employ qualitative data interpretation to provide an objective analysis of the career transition of African American male athletes.

To adequately provide this information, I am asking you to participate in a pre interview, focus group, and individual interview. The focus group and individual interviews will be audio/video taped. The audio/video tape interviews will be transcribed and shared with the participant before analysis.

**Time Involvement:**

Your participation will require a day and a half commitment. The interviews will not last longer than two hours. You are encouraged to provide candid responses to each of the questions. You are not obligated to answer every question.

**Risk and Benefits:**

The risks associated with this study are minimal and may be limited to discomfort or uncertainty about whether the information requested by the investigator is public knowledge and can be published in a dissertation. Additionally, you may feel uncomfortable about reflecting on past occurrences that were adverse. I cannot and do not guarantee or promise that you will receive any benefits from this study. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your reputation.

**Payments:**

Your hotel accommodations and meals will be provided for you as a participant in the study. Additionally, you will receive a travel stipend if needed.

**Participants Rights:**

If you have read this form and have decided to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. The alternative is not to participate. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. The results of this research study may be presented at scientific or professional meetings or published in scientific journals.

**Confidentiality:**

Every effort will be made to ensure anonymity unless written permission is provided by you (participant) to disclose your name.

**IRB Approval:**

This study has been reviewed by the University of Mississippi's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has determined that this study fulfills the human research subject protections obligations required by state and federal law and University policies. If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a participant of research, please contact the IRB at (662) 915-7482.

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the information above and have been given a copy of this form. I have had the opportunity to ask questions, and received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

---

Participant Signature

---

Date

---

Investigator Signature

---

Date

## APPENDIX C: RELEASE OF RIGHTS



# THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI

## RELEASE OF RIGHTS FORM

For valuable consideration, I \_\_\_\_\_ do hereby authorize The University of Mississippi, its assignees, agents, employees, designees, and those acting pursuant to its authority ("UM") to:

- a. Record my participation and appearance on audio/video tape or any other recording medium.
- b. Use my name, likeness, voice and biographical material in connection with these recordings.
- c. Copy, reproduce, or distribute such recordings of my words in whole or in part into derivative works without limitation in any format or medium for any purpose which The University of Mississippi, and those acting pursuant to its authority, deem appropriate.
- d. I hold the University and the researchers harmless from any and all claims and demands arising out of or in connection with the use of such Recordings including any claims for defamation, invasion of privacy, rights of publicity, or copyright.
- e. I agree that I will receive no further consideration and no royalty payments for use of my words.
- f. I understand that my participation is voluntary. My refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I understand that I may discontinue my participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone No.: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX D: PRE-INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

## **Pre Interview Protocol**

Description (See Consent Form)

### **Demographic Information**

Name:

State of Birth:

Household environment (single or both parents):

Age:

Occupation:

Sport:

Marital Status:

Institution attended in college:

College graduate (yes or no):

Years in college:

Scholarship Status (scholarship player or walk on):

Major:

Grade Point Average:

Years played in the NFL:

## APPENDIX E: FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

## **Focus Group Protocol**

### **Opening Script:**

Gentlemen, thanks so much for coming and agreeing to be a part of this study that will seek to understand and explore perceptions of African American male football athletes at Division I institutions who also played professional football, regarding their collegiate experiences and transition from athletics to post-playing careers. We are interested in understanding your perspectives about career transition. Know that there are no right or wrong answers. Second, you should not feel that you have to agree with everyone else in this room if that's not how you really feel. There are six participants in this room, so we expect that people will have different views. It's important that we learn about all of the views that are represented here. However, if you find yourself feeling upset about the talk, you can leave at any time. Third, we want you to feel comfortable saying good things as well as critical things. We are not here to promote a particular way of thinking about former African American football players and career transition. We just want to understand how each of you makes sense of the phenomena. Fourth, we ask that you talk one at a time so that we can be sure to hear everyone's views and get them on tape. Lastly, when you say something, please say your name first so that the person transcribing the tape will know who is talking. You can say, "this is (name)" or "this is (name) speaking" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

### **Questions:**

#### **Race and Social Interaction**

How important is/was football to you?

How much do you feel race plays a role in sports?

Describe what it is/was like being a black student-athlete on a predominately white campus?

What are your feelings about African Americans in collegiate sports being used or exploited?

What do you recommend to address problems of unequal treatment for student-athletes?

#### **Academic Preparation**

Do each of you feel that you were prepared for college?

What was the priority, sports or academics?

Did your coaches, athletics staff, and university personnel emphasize academics? If so, how so or if not, why not?

How important is/was graduating to you?

What was your experience like in selecting your college major?

### **Economic Status**

Growing up, what was your family's financial situation?

In college, do you feel that your scholarship was enough to adequately support your needs?

What are your feelings regarding student-athletes being compensated?

Did you feel like a pro career would solve financial issues for you and others? Why?

### **Leadership Opportunities**

Growing in up your households and hometowns, did you see African Americans occupying leadership spaces (mayors, principals, head coaches, lawyers, doctors, CEOs, etc.)?

How many black role models were there on campus (athletics staff, coaches, campus)?

Do you feel African Americans receive the same opportunities to serve in leadership roles? If not, why?

Did you feel sports were the only way to upward mobility? If so, why?

Do you believe you would be who you are without sports? Explain?

## APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

## **Interview Schedule**

### **Friday, Month-TBD, 2013**

11:00 AM-1:00 PM    Guests Arrive to Hotel and Check-In  
1:30 PM-2:30 PM    **Lunch with Participants** (Room- TBD)  
2:40 PM            Focus Group Session- All participants (Room- TBD)  
4:40 PM            Break  
5:30 PM            Dinner- All participants (Room-TBD)  
6:45 PM            Individual Interview- Participant 1 (Room-TBD)  
8:30 PM            Break  
8:45 PM            Individual Interview- Participant 2 (Room-TBD)  
10:30 PM           Break  
11:00 PM           Lights Out

### **Saturday, Month- TBD, 2013**

**\*\*\*Checkout time is 11am in case you get a late checkout\*\*\***

7:30-8:15 AM       Breakfast (Room- TBD)  
8:30 AM            Individual Interview- Participant 3- (Room- TBD)  
10:00 AM           Break  
10:10 AM           Individual Interview- Participant 4- (Room- TBD)  
11:40 PM           Break  
12:00-12:45 PM    **Lunch**  
1:00 PM            Individual Interview- Participant 5- (Room- TBD)  
2:30 PM            Break  
2:40 PM            Individual Interview- Participant 6- (Room- TBD)  
4:10 PM            End Interviews

**\*\*\*Special Contact Personnel\*\*\***

**Jamil Northcutt**

Cell number: (662) 832-8008

Email: [jamiln@olemiss.edu](mailto:jamiln@olemiss.edu)



## APPENDIX G: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

## **Individual Interview Protocol**

### **Opening Script:**

(Name of participant), thanks for agreeing to be a part of this study that will seek to understand and explore perceptions of African American male football athletes at Division I institutions who also played professional football, regarding their collegiate experiences and transition from athletics to post-playing careers. We are interested in understanding your perspectives about career transition. Know that there are no right or wrong answers. Second, it's important that we learn about your views. However, if you find yourself feeling upset during the interview, you can leave at any time. Third, we want you to feel comfortable saying good things as well as critical things. We are not here to promote a particular way of thinking about former African American football players and career transition. We just want to understand how you make sense of the phenomena. Lastly, as we begin, please say your name first so that the person transcribing the tape will know who is talking. You can say, "this is (name)" or "this is (name) speaking" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Additionally, we ask that you talk clearly so that we can be sure to get your comments on tape. As a reminder, the release form you signed gives us permission to record this interview. Your participation in this interview is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. Any questions before we start? Let's begin.

### **Childhood and Family**

Tell me a little about your family (background)?

What was it like in your home with your family growing up?

How old were you when you started playing sports?

Who was your role model growing up? (other than parents)

Discuss your parent's role in your athletic involvement?

Was football an emphasis in your family?

Did you feel pressure to play sports by family, friends, the community?

Do you feel your parents and others saw sports as an opportunity for you to be successful

(Get a scholarship or go pro)?

Did you feel that sports were the only way to go to college?

When did you see sports as a potential career (going pro)?

What were your other interests?

Do you think African American families overemphasize sports as a success model? If so, how so?

Do you believe sports are the best way for African American men to be successful?

What else can you do really well other than sports? Why didn't you pursue that?

### **Racism /Fair Treatment/ Exploitation**

Were their racial tensions where you were raised?

Do you feel that African Americans get a fair chance to succeed in life as Caucasians?

How much do you feel race plays a role in sports?

How was a difference made in college and the NFL between white and black players?

Do you feel that African Americans are used at the college level?

Do you feel that African Americans benefit equally in college football as the university?

Were you treated fairly in college?

Do you feel that politics played a role in how you were treated and who participated on the field?

Do you feel like your coaches and others cared about you?

Describe what it is/was like being a black student-athlete on a predominately white campus?

How many black role models were there on campus (athletics staff, coaches, campus)?

What do you recommend to address problems of unequal treatment for student-athletes?

Do you feel you were exploited? If so, how?

### **Student-athlete's Motivation to Play Professionally**

Have you always wanted to be a pro athlete?

How strong was that desire (to go pro) and how serious did you take it?

Did you feel like you always had a chance to play professionally before college and after college?

Were you ever educated about the realities/statistics of making it to the NFL and longevity of the career if you made it?

Why do you think African American men expect to play pro ball?

Do you feel like sports were the only way to upward mobility?

### **Major (Academic Clustering)**

Why did you choose the major you chose in college?

Is the major you chose what you wanted to pursue?

Did you feel pressured to pursue the major you were in?

Do you feel academics were important to your coaches?

How much did your coaches discuss academics and other career interest?

Did your coaches encourage you to participate in any internships or programs to help you with finding a job post-playing career?

How important do you feel earning (you and other student-athletes) a college degree was to the athletics department (coaches, athletic staff, university personnel)?

### **Time Demands of Sports**

How much time do you feel you spent on football activities in college?

Were there programs that focused on other careers other than sports?

Do you feel you had time to participate in other activities on campus as a student-athlete?

Were your coaches supportive of you participating in other programs on campus that focused on your development as student and professional?

Did you feel you could complete internships in the summer and not be penalized?

### **Faculty Perceptions of Student-athletes**

Do you feel you were treated differently in classes because you were an athlete?

Do you feel your teachers respected you as a student?

Were your teachers accommodating to your travel schedule?

Do you feel your teachers respected or valued your intellectual abilities?

### **Transition**

How difficult was it for you and your family when football ended?

How would you describe your transition from football to another career?

How does it make you feel that you cannot play sports any longer?

Do you know what you want to do in life?

Do you feel like you know where to start to fulfill what you believe to be your purpose?

Do you still think about plays you did not make? Why?

Are you taking advantage of programs offered by the NFL?

Do you feel welcome at your alma mater?

How important do you feel a degree is to your future success?

What opportunities/occupations did you prepare for outside of sports?

Was your profession and educational development a priority?

### **Athletic Identity**

How would your peers define you as a person?

How important is/was football to you?

When did you start to define yourself as an athlete?

Can you imagine not being anything else other than an athlete?

Do you believe you are still an athlete?

How important are athletics in your life and others?

Do you believe you would be who you are without sports?

## VITA

### K. “JAMIL” NORTHCUTT

910 Augusta Drive #504. Oxford, MS 38655. (662) 832-8008. [jamiln@olemiss.edu](mailto:jamiln@olemiss.edu).

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### PROFESSIONAL SUMMARY

Respected and self-motivated executive with 14+ years of experience in collegiate and professional athletics as a student-athlete and athletics administrator. Known for leadership ability, altruistic qualities, and strategic focused approach. Professional, creative, and action-oriented individual with proven ability to empower, engage, and enhance the lives of others. Highly skilled in sports administration, strategic planning, marketing, negotiations, customer relations and collaboration, event management, outreach, and motivating others.

### EDUCATION

M.A., Higher Education, University of Mississippi, December 2004

B.S., Exercise Science, University of Mississippi, May 2003

### SPECIAL TRAINING

**National Collegiate Athletic Association** Indianapolis, IN

*NCAA Career in Sports Forum Facilitator Training* May 2012

*NCAA Leadership Forum Facilitator Training* September 2011

*NCAA Conference Intern Seminar* January 2005

*NCAA Foundation Leadership Conference Participant* Summer 2001

**1A Athletic Directors' Association** Las Colinas, TX

*Division I-A AD Institute Graduate* July 2011

**National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics**

*Participant* June 2011

*Participant* June 2012

**National Football League** New York, NY

*NFL and NCAA Coaches Academy Moderator* February 2013

“The Coaching Search Process”

*NFL and NCAA Life Skills and Professional Development Summit* February 2011

*Player Development Intervention Training* March 2006

“Crisis, Communication, and Conflict Resolution”

NFL Rookie Symposium

*Team Leader and Facilitator* Palm Beach Gardens, FL June 2005

*Team Leader and Facilitator* Carlsbad, CA June 2006

*Team Leader and Facilitator* Palm Beach Gardens, FL June 2007

## **SPORTS ADMINISTRATION WORK EXPERIENCE**

Ole Miss Athletic Department, Southeastern Conference, University of Mississippi

*Assistant Athletic Director for Internal Operations* January 2008 – Present

Kansas City Chiefs Football Club, National Football League, Kansas City, Missouri

*Player Development Coordinator* June 2005 – January 2008

Southeastern Conference (SEC), Birmingham, Alabama

*Championships/Marketing/Administration Intern* September 2004 – June 2005

Ole Miss Athletic Department, Southeastern Conference, University of Mississippi

*Football Operations Graduate Assistant* Summer 2004

## **HIGHER EDUCATION WORK EXPERIENCE**

Chancellor’s Office, University of Mississippi

*Practicum Student* Spring 2004

Dean of Students Office, Greek Life, University of Mississippi

*Practicum Student* Fall 2003

## **HONORS AND ACTIVITIES**

University of Mississippi Football Team 1999-2003

Academic All-SEC Team 2000-2003

UMAA Honor Roll 1999-2003

Arthur Ashe Jr. Sports Scholar 2001 – Men’s Football 1<sup>st</sup> Team

American Football Coaches Association 2003 Good Works Team

Chucky Mullins Courage Award Recipient 2003

Southeastern Conference Community Service Postgraduate Scholarship 2004

2001 NCAA Foundation Leadership Conference Participant

2011 NCAA Leadership Facilitator

2011 Division I-A AD Institute Graduate

M-Club Alumni Association Life Member

Ole Miss Alumni Association Life Member

Fellowship of Christian Athletes Board Member

Black Coaches and Administrators Member

Minority Opportunities Athletic Association, Inc. Member

National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics Member

Chucky Mullins Courage Award Committee Member 2009-2012

2008 NFL’s Most Outstanding Player Development Program Award Recipient



2007 N4A Convention Panelist  
Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. Member  
Ole Miss Accessibility Committee Member

## **COMMITTEE INVOLVEMENT**

Vice Chancellor-Student Affairs Search Committee Spring 2012  
Head Track Coach Search Committee Spring 2012  
Committee on Accessibility 2012-Present  
University of Mississippi Strategic Plan Student Experience Committee 2011-2012  
Senior Associate AD for Compliance Search Committee Spring 2011  
Dean of Students Celebration of Achievement Committee 2010-Present  
Assistant AD for Finance Search Committee Summer 2009  
Chucky Mullins Courage Award Selection Committee 2009-Present  
NCAA Student-Athlete Well Being Committee 2009-Present  
Campus Sustainability Committee 2009-Present  
Diversity Committee 2009-Present  
Athletic Aid Committee 2008-2011  
School Spirit Committee 2008-2010  
Football Bowl Organizing Committee 2008-Present  
Homecoming Committee 2008-Present  
Football Game Day Committee 2008-Present

## **COMMUNITY SERVICE**

Adopt-A-Basket Program  
United Way  
Books & Bears Committee  
St. Jude  
Toys for Tots  
Move Mississippi  
Oxford Middle School Mentor  
SEC Can Food Drive

## **PRESENTATIONS**

Presenter, Money Matters, EDHE 105, July 16, 2013  
Presenter, Sports Careers, UM Sports Marketing Class, May 21, 2013  
Presenter, Athlete Agent Education, UM Football Team, 2009-2013  
Keynote, Careers, Della Davidson Elementary, April 12, 2013  
Moderator, NFL/NCAA Coaches Academy, Coaching Search Process, February 2013  
Keynote, Leadership, Ole Miss Dining Manager Graduation, December 5, 2012  
Facilitator, NCAA Career in Sports Forum, June 2012  
Speaker, Memphis, TN M-Club Luncheon, February 12, 2012  
Presenter, Social Networking Education, UM Sports Teams, 2009-2012  
Facilitator, NCAA Leadership Forum, November 2011  
Presenter, Conflict Resolution, UM EDHE 670, October 13, 2011  
Presenter, NBA Life Skills, UM Basketball Team, 2009-2010  
Speaker, Jackson, MS Key City Reception, UM Alumni Meeting, September 30, 2010

Keynote, Hell Is a Real Place, Regent's School of Oxford, April 27, 2009  
Keynote, Apex Leadership Summit Luncheon, July 21, 2009  
Keynote, Football and Education, Rosa Fort High School, October 29, 2009  
Speaker, Memphis, TN Key City Reception, UM Alumni Meeting, September 2009  
Presenter, NFL Life Skills, University of Nebraska, September 2007  
Presenter, NFL Life Skills, University of Missouri, April 2006